Hiding in Plain Sight

Subjectivity, mimetic representation & the digital realm

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Abstract

This study offers a critical exploration of the ways in which Jean Baudrillard's theory of the simulacrum is 'true' or viable as a theory of representation in contemporary visual culture, with particular reference to digital imaging technologies. Using a selection of images and texts dating from the Renaissance to present day, I trace issues of subjectivity and self-reflexivity in modern image culture, questioning the extent to which digital imaging technology and information substantially departs from the early modern devotion to naturalistic representation (verisimilitude) as a reflection of knowledge and truth in the modern world. I offer a critique of the simulacrum theory that concerns two principle issues: firstly that simulacrum is a strictly self-reflexive operation and not an effect of digital imaging technology as Baudrillard claims; and secondly, that simulacrum necessitates an underlying dualist worldview in order to exist.

With reference to the use of metaphor in magical realist texts and visual art, I draw the argument together with a discussion of my own art practice, particularly a body of work that takes Etienne van Heerden's novel *Toorberg* (1986) as a starting point. The examples I refer to serve as visual evidence in support of my speculative philosophical argument against hyperreality; that is, how the simulacral nature of metaphor (as operating within a poststructuralist model of the sign) functions a critical aspect of a self-reflexive individual consciousness; and argues for subjectivity itself as inherently bound up in the operation of simulacrum.

Opsomming

Hierdie studie is ’n kritiese ondersoek na die wyse waarop Jean Baudrillard se teorie van die *simulacrum* ‘waar’ of grondig is as ’n teorie van representasie in visuele kultuur, met spesifieke verwysing na digitale beeldtegnologie. ‘n Verskeidenheid beelde en tekste (van die Renaissance tot die moderne era) word betrek ten einde kwessies rondom subjektiwiteit en selfrefleksiwiteit in moderne beeldkultuur te ondersoek. Die mate waarin digitale beeldtegnologie en inligting merkbaar afwyk van ‘n vroeë moderne toegewydheid aan naturalistiese representasie (*verisimilitude*) as ‘n refleksie van kennis en waarheid in die moderne wêreld, word vervolgens krities ondersoek. Baudrillard se *simulacrum*-teorie word krities beoordeel: in die eerste plek is die simulacrum ‘n streng selfrefleksiewe proses en nie ‘n effek van digitale beeldtegnologie, soos Baudrillard beweer nie; en tweedens veronderstel, of noodsaak die *simulacrum* ‘n onderliggende dualistiese wêreldbeeld ten einde geldig verklaar te kan word.

Met verwysing na die gebruik van metafoor in magies realistiese tekste en visuele kuns, word die argument saamgevat deur ’n bespreking van my persoonlike kunsprojek, vernaam ’n versameling werk wat Etienne van Heerden se roman *Toorberg* (1986) as verwysingspunt gebruik. Die voorbeelde waarna ek verwys ondersteun my spekulatiewe filosofiese argument teen hiperrealiteit (*hyperreality*); hoe die simulakrale (*simulacral*) aard van metafoor (soos werksaam binne ’n poststrukturalistiese model van die ‘teken’) as ’n kritiese aspek van selfrefleksiewe individuele bewussyn funksioneer. Ek argumenteer vervolgens dat subjektiwiteit sigself inherent deel is van die werking van *simulacrum*.

Declaration

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Introduction

This study is an exploration of the ways in which Jean Baudrillard's theory of the simulacrum is 'true' or viable as a theory of the context, reception and interpretation of images in the contemporary Western world, with particular reference to the digital image realm. For Baudrillard and Paul Virilio, the notion of simulacrum is innately bound up with our relationship to technology, specifically technologies of representation and the visual.[1] This would suggest that in a world where visual technologies are allowing us not only to imagine but also create increasingly realistic, virtual spaces and experiences, the simulacrum has an increasingly critical purchase on contemporary theories of representation. And yet, surveying key strategies and technologies of representation in Western visual culture from the Renaissance to the present, I fail to see how the function of digital imaging technology makes a substantial break from an early modern devotion to naturalistic representation and the production of knowledge through visual practices, despite the radical shifts in discourses of the visual within and between modernist and postmodernist frameworks.

Central to this enquiry is the issue of subjectivity. How we experience images and perceive greater and lesser degrees of verisimilitude with the world around us has a great deal to do with how we make sense of the world, and the cognitive and conceptual frameworks we employ to process and interpret visual information. However, it is my contention that the dominant theory of the simulacrum (Baudrillard) does not adequately account for the mechanisms of subjectivity within the 'economy' of the simulacrum, nor does it interrogate the kind of worldview that is required for the simulacrum to actually function (if indeed it can be said that theories 'function' instrumentally).

My critique of the simulacrum focuses on two main points. Firstly, that simulacrum is a strictly self-reflexive operation and not as Baudrillard claims, an effect of digital imaging technology (1996:5). Understanding the simulacrum as an effect of technology is akin to describing it as an artefact of said technology, something that is produced by technology, through its own methods. However, through my research of selected examples of visual works (from the realm of fine art and popular culture), I have come to regard the simulacrum as more than simply an 'effect'. I see it located in the interaction between subjectivity and material and/or mental images. That is, that the simulacrum represents a collapse between forms of perception; a destabilisation of the boundary between the

[1] Baudrillard (1994; 1996; 2003) and Virilio (1994; 2006; 2007a; 2007b).

material and the mental.[2] In the context of digital culture, which is the specific focus of my creative practice, I understand subjectivity as a spatio-temporal point of observation which is always, and at all times, surrounded by physical and mental images.

Secondly, I assert that the concept of simulacrum requires an underlying dualist worldview (notion of reality) in order to exist or become evident; not a monistic worldview, as Baudrillard's theoretical model seems to infer.[3] By this I mean that the mechanisms and operations of simulacrum cannot function inside a monistic worldview, which excludes the binary of 'real' versus 'fake'.

We are never going to solve the 'problem' of the illusion of reality because our capacity to imagine – to think, interpret and create images – is so deeply implicated in perpetuating what we perceive to be 'real'. It creates the illusion. But understanding the role of self-reflexivity within this is critical to understanding when and how the simulacrum comes into play.

There are five key concerns, or areas of exploration, that have shaped and motivated both my theoretical and creative research and which I have used here to develop my critique of the simulacrum. I identify the connection between Cartesian objective rationality and naturalism in painting, in order to shed some light on the motivations behind the search for verisimilitude in visual representation since the Renaissance. I link this to contemporary high definition technology and digitally manipulated imagery associated with Baudrillard's simulacrum. I resist the notion of digitally enhanced or manufactured imagery as a 'threat' to the real, on the basis that simulacrum is strictly a self-reflexive or cognitive operation. Further, I explore the notion of metaphor as a form of simulacrum, suggesting that it is in fact crucial to the existence of self-reflexive consciousness. And finally, I make reference to the genre of magic realism in literature to show how it uncovers the ontological nature of metaphor (as simulacrum), and how this pertains to my own personal (visual) narrative.

With reference to the use of metaphor in magical realist texts and visual art, I draw my argument together with a discussion of selected examples from my own art practice. I show how the simulacral nature of metaphor, operating within a poststructuralist model, is characteristic of self-reflexive individual consciousness not only in our contemporary experience, but as it has been in visual

[2] Subjectivity itself, I contend, is a simulacral operation in that it necessarily uses metaphors, and flees from *dasein*. I explore this further in the following chapters, with reference to Jacques Lacan's theory of subjectivity, particularly his 'mirror phase' theory. His image of the mirror and the process of acknowledging the 'reflected self' is particularly useful in my discussion of the desire for verisimilitude in visual representation and reproduction and the various strategies and techniques in Western art that have attempted to achieve this.

[3] Baudrillard (1994:2-3) suggests that the contemporary world marks a collapse into a monist-type hyperreality wherein everything is reduced to its appearance or image. Or stated differently, a world wherein self-consciousness approaches all registers of sensible reality as image only.

culture since the early modern period. The examples I employ serve as visual evidence in support of my speculative and polemical philosophical argument against hyperreality, and the idea that subjectivity is itself bound up in the operation of the simulacrum.

Dualism, monism and the simulacrum

Patrick J.J. Phillips (2007:38) contends that we can never have direct or unmediated access to reality. He states the following on the general problem we encounter in the perception of reality: "we have no means of coping with the real world except from a particular perspective, a particular framework or a particular culture […] [T]here is no reality independent of stances, aspects or points of view". My discussion of ontological ideas, of which Sartre's (2000; 2001) stands out, is against the background of this relativist approach to reality. I thus hold the idea that we are always already removed from reality in every which way to be true.

In the philosophy of mind, dualism most importantly concerns the relationship between either mind and matter or mind and body, the latter meaning that the mental and the physical are of the same category, and the former suggesting they are, in some respects, non-physical (Hart 1996:265-7). The most famous proponent of this model is René Descartes (1596-1650). The subject of Cartesian rationalism, generally referred to as the cogito, is perhaps the fundamental element of Western philosophy. The phrase, *cogito ergo sum* (I think, therefore I am) postulates a thinking subject in an objective world, and implicates a radical "detaching of the subject from the object" (Langer 1989:111).

Cartesian dualism is directly linked with the advent of modernity[4] (Toulmin 1990:43), the time in human history when "a doctrine of the autonomy of the self and its project of self-determination" emerges (Delanty 2000:3). No doubt a consequence of this new dualist philosophical model, the modern subject[5] rests on scepticism towards the appearance of reality, ontological doubt of reality-

[4] Modernity generally refers to a post-traditional or post-medieval stage in the development of Western culture, marked by rationalisation, secularisation and also the nation-state, which paved the way for full-blown capitalism and industrialisation (Barker 2005:444). To clarify the assumption that modernity is a Western development, Kafala (2007:22) explains that because "knowledge has become synonymous with technology, science and information, modernity in turn has become synonymous with the West, which has been the master of technological and scientific power since the Renaissance".

[5] Mansfield (2000:3-4) indicates four basic types of subject associated with the general idea of subjectivity; the subject of grammar, the politico-legal subject, the philosophical subject, and the subject as human person. Whereas the first three notions of subject are for the most part defined by an external, symbolic system, or sets of discourses, the subject as human person "remain[s] an intense focus of rich and immediate experience that defies system, logic and order and that goes out into the world in a complex, inconsistent and highly charged way" (Mansfield 2000:4). He also thinks this incomplete and experiencing type of subject is what is understood by personality of selfhood (Mansfield 2000:4). Although defining the modern human subject can prove extremely complex and even contradictory, in this instance I only refer to its origins in Enlightenment thought.

as-given.[6] Descartes' emphasis on the 'I think' part of his now infamous aphorism not only favours abstract, decontextualized and universal ideas, but also erects what many call binary oppositions within intellectual discourse since the Renaissance (Toulmin 1990:20-21).

Cartesian dualism is also more specifically referred to as 'substance'-dualism, referring to a key concept in ontology and metaphysics that has to do with objecthood, or things-in-themselves.[7] It stands in critical opposition to monistic conceptions of reality. In science, Samuel Guttenplan (2001:122) explains, monism is a form of materialism which implies that "the fundamental properties of matter and energy as described by physics are counted the only properties there is". In philosophy, A.C. Grayling (2010:241) has identified mentalistic monism as similar to idealism; "the thesis that mind and its ideas constitute a basic reality". Descartes is generally understood to represent a substance-dualist position.[8]

The Enlightenment priority given to thought or thinking in general, taken together with Langer's (1989:111) 'detachment' of subject from object, means that the *cogito* serves as a model for the notion of the self as a separate, singular and also unified entity. It also epitomizes the abstract and decontextualized thinking which Stephen Toulmin (1990:24) aligns with the second phase of modernity's origin. He argues the "17th century triumph of rationalism" (Toulmin 1990:80) as a response to the entire history of practical aspect philosophy before Descartes. It is in this regard he associates the postmodern mistrust in abstract and decontextualizing meta-narratives as return to pre-Cartesian philosophy. But a dualist conception of reality seems to also be an a priori condition for two dominant theories of the postmodern, namely the poststructuralist model of the sign, as well as Baudrillard's formulation of hyperreality (1994), a fundamental component of his theory of the simulacrum.

The term 'postmodern' implies more than just a rupture in the course of modernity. Rather, it states that, that which can be considered as modernity is over and done with. Bauman (1992:187) regards postmodernity as "fully developed modernity taking a full measure of the anticipated consequences of its historical work; […] as modernity conscious of its true nature – modernity for itself". He furthermore outlines the "conspicuous features" of the postmodern: "institutionalized pluralism,

[6] In case of using the phrase 'a given reality' I mean reality as an external world-as-scene into which all are born and subject to. It is the reality which is likely to remain 'in place' even when it is not observed by a subject.

[7] In ontology, numerous theories and ideas, of which I note *dasein* and being-in-itself contemplate the nature of reality beyond human perception and comprehension of it. It therefore refers to the part of reality which we can never access because of the relativity of our perspective.

[8] Although Descartes is generally considered a notorious proponent of substance dualism, he tends towards a kind of substance monism in his definition of 'substance' in Part One of *Principles of Philosophy*, where is stated, according to Kulstad (2003:66): "By substance we can understand nothing other than a thing which exists in such a way as to depend on no other thing for its existence […]. [t]here is only one substance… namely God".

variety, contingency and ambivalence" (Bauman 1992:187). In opposition to the modern meta-narrative of progress, the postmodern "is both undetermined and undetermining. It 'unbinds' time; weakens the constraining impact of the past and effectively prevents colonization of the future" (Bauman 1992:190). However, the notion that postmodernity marks hostility towards meta-narratives in general is one of its central fallacies and is explored throughout this text. And if postmodernity can claim a definitive characteristic at all, the glut of images and information – post-digital reformation – is it.

Madan Sarup (1993:165) explains hyperreality and simulacrum as "a new condition in which the old tension between reality and illusion… has been dissipated," that "everything is 'hyper' – in excess of itself". As a result, "reality is no longer checked, called to justify itself" and therefore come to be "more real than real" (Sarup 1993:166). Simulacrum thus marks the momentary occurrence of collapse between 'reality' as perceived and visual, linguistic and other 'copies' or interpretations of this 'reality'. It marks the point wherein mental and cognitive mediation of a given reality produces 'reality'.[9] In other words, the entire image system characteristic of postmodern media culture no longer supplements reality, but rather informs and constitutes reality.

Baudrillard (1996:5) explains the simulacrum's motivations: "[T]his is what we do with the problem of truth or reality of this world: we have resolved it by technical simulation, and by creating a profusion of images in which there is nothing to see". In another instance he associates reality with an absence, "a non-immediacy of things", something which doesn't even take place at all (Baudrillard 1996:7).

Baudrillard's simulacrum is firmly embedded within a dualist model, necessitating a fundamental difference between reality and illusion or copy and original. He states that whereas representation rests on equivalence between the sign and the real, simulation seeks the utopia of this equivalence at all costs (Baudrillard 1994:4). So even though simulacrum is the negation of sign value and referent, it nonetheless needs such components to exist. In other words, the potential of a direct relation between signifier and signified must have existed at some point. Baudrillard describes a hyperreality wherein the bond between signifier and signified is no longer required to justify itself, wherein "the image can no longer imagine the real, because it is the real" (Baudrillard 1996:4).[10]

[9] Baudrillard (1996:3) states that "the main objective of reality is its propensity to submit unconditionally to every hypothesis you can make about it […]. It submits to everything with unrelenting servility".

[10] My use of the word 'image' is broad and should be understood within the specific context it is used. However, in most cases it will either refer to a physical likeness or representation or a mental representation (Dictionary.com 2010. Sv. 'image').

Simulacrum thus points towards a slippage between image and reality to the effect that image equals reality. The circulation and production of the image, as produced by the available technology in late capitalist society, stands as the anchor point for 'reality'. But the simulacrum theory fails to differentiate between different forms or 'cases' of simulacrum associated with different disciplines or registers of Reality so much so that Michaël W. Smith (2001:3) was prompted to remark that Baudrillard has "[given] up on reality".

I regard simulacrum as instances wherein the world momentary, or of longer duration, seem like a monistic realm, wherein all registers of reality, whether mental and material, exist simultaneously. However, as with the nature of self-reflexive consciousness, the thinking 'I' always falls back on a dualist position, better defined as the understanding of the idea of subjectivity as isolated and differentiated 'entity'. Contemporary image-culture, although on the one hand superficial, confusing and alienating, nonetheless presents a viewer with a monist type matrix or simulation world, wherein all things are connected, and made up of the same 'stuff'. Wherein there is only code as physical manifestation. Or stated differently, a monist 'reality' wherein there is only image.

Image consciousness and self-reflexivity

The notion of Being (theorized by, amongst others Sartre 2001; Heidegger 2005), differentiated into being-in-itself and being-for-itself (also referred to as *dasein*), maintains a reality as in-itself and entirely present to itself.[11] The idea of an image consciousness[12] (Sartre in Trifonova 2007) is particularly valuable in understanding the complex relationship between image, self and 'reality'. Image consciousness in some ways goes against poststructuralist linguistic theories, for it maintains a difference between linguistic interpretation and image consciousness. Sartre (in Embree & Sepp 2010) insists that aesthetic elements (in art), like colour, are not to be interpreted. They are indicative of themselves and can be experienced in an instant. Image consciousness also refers to a kind of mental "derealized anti-world" wherein unreal objects and space chain together to form a sensible image-consciousness beyond linguistic interpretation. In some ways, it is like interplay between *dasein* and self-reflexive consciousness, for in moments of the negation of meaning, one

[11] Cox (2006:7) explains that Sartre's notion of being can only be explained with the idea that being just is. Being-in-itself is thus irrespective of non-being and thus never "other-than-another-being" (Sartre cited in Cox 2006:7). Being-in-itself refers to a monistic aspect of reality and/or consciousness. In Sartre's (2000) *Being and Nothingness*, a distinction is made between non-being and being. Whilst being is "a full possivity" which "knows no otherness", as Cox (2006:8) explains, non-being is described as being-for-itself. What Cox (2006:8) understands as being-for-itself is having "to achieve, for-itself" it's being as the non-being of being-in-itself by perpetually negating being-in-itself". Being-for-itself thus very much concerns self-reflexive consciousness and its perpetual negation of Pure undifferentiated being, and a dualist approach to reality. Cox (2006:7) explains that Sartre's notion of being can only be explained with the idea that being just is. Being-in-itself is thus irrespective of non-being and thus never "other-than-another-being" (Sartre cited in Cox 2006:7). Being-in-itself refers to a monistic aspect of reality and/or consciousness.

[12] A detailed discussion of the notion of image-consciousness is beyond the scope of this thesis, so I refer to it only as it is immediately pertinent to this discussion.

can still see the world or the object in perception. This suggests that there must be something detectable (in a 'materially autonomous' sense) associated with the appearance of things, for otherwise one wouldn't be able to see something if it is not understood.

In Descartes, Cottingham (2002:30) notes a kind of paranoia concerning the appearance of things:

> [T]here is a malicious demon of the utmost power and cunning who employs all his energies in order to deceive him. Thus the whole external world may be a sham: the sky, the air, the earth, colours, shapes, sounds and all external things are merely delusions of dreams which he has devised to ensnare my credulity.

Dasgupta (2009:208) contends that "doubt arises between a true and a false perception as when I perceive a face in the mirror, but do not know whether it is a real face or not until it is decided by an attempt to feel it by touch". To think is to doubt.

We copy reality to see if it is possible that it might be an illusion after all. But our search for illusion is exactly what produces illusion in the first place (Bauman 1992:153). Naturalism[13] in Renaissance painting provides the link between subjectivity and mimetic representations. Finding it impossible to supply a better summary of mimesis compared to that of Matthew Potolsky's (2006:1-2), I cite his full outline of this concept:

> Mimesis describes things, such as artworks, as well as actions, situations, such as imitating another person. Mimesis can be said to imitate a dizzying array of originals: nature, truth, beauty, mannerisms, actions, situations, examples, ideas. The word has been used to describe the imitative relationship between master and disciple, an artwork and its audience, and the material world and a rational order of ideas. Mimesis takes on different guises in different historical contexts, masquerading under a variety of related terms and translations, emulation, mimicry, dissimulation, doubling, theatricality, realism, identification, correspondence, depiction, verisimilitude, resemblance. […] Mimesis is always double, at once good and bad, natural and unnatural, necessary and dispensable.

Mimesis is an ontological operation. It is the reproduction of 'reality', and an awareness of 'reality' as always-already reproduced by the senses and the mind. Alongside Cartesian objective rationalism,[14] naturalistic representation and a scientific approach to perspective in the early

[13] When written in lowercase, the term 'naturalism' can refer to images and paintings from any period as long as the representation is "thought to be consistent with natural appearance, as opposed to stylization" (*Academic Dictionary of Arts* 2005. Sv. 'naturalism').

[14] Bourke (1962:286) explains rationalism as a method or theory wherein "the criterion of the truth is not sensory but intellectual and deductive".

modern period seek to copy the world 'perfectly', that is, with an extreme degree of verisimilitude that would find an ideological equivalent with the invention of photography some years later. The scientific manner in which the artisan approaches the world-as-object only veils his true purpose, and it is only in digital image culture its purpose is fully revealed. For besides the scientific 'peeling away of the world', which has no doubt unlocked many secrets, the desire to simulate sensible reality, in digital 3D, does not necessarily serve scientific inquiry.

Naturalism and digital simulation is not the simulation of a given reality. It is merely a metaphor, and physical manifestation of reality as always already simulated by the mind. Likewise, simulacrum is not to be found outside. Cartesian dualism assumes an internal mental world of objects, but importantly also, as Lacan (2001) suggests, an internal hologram of the specular body-image in his mirror stage theory. Lacanian psychoanalysis identifies three different orders or registers of existence, namely the Real, the Symbolic and the Imaginary. Eugene Kenneth Willet (2007:8) defines the Lacanian Imaginary as the "order of images and imaginary relations", the Symbolic as "the order of language and discourse and the Law", and the Real, which is "an order of existence before thinking, before language". If the ego[15] is the residual 'build-up' of the specular (reflected) body-image, self-reflexivity could be understood as the continual attempt to judge 'reality' by comparing reality as it appears (sense-data 'seen' be the mind) and as it is again made present (represented as mental imagery).

The problem faced by self-reflexive consciousness is quite obvious here. Self-reflexive consciousness is captivated by the 'image-ness' of subjective experience. I refer here to 'reality' given as image (sensible simulation) in perception as well as in memory and thought. But the problem lies not in the suspicion that subjective experience is absolutely mediated, or that one can only know reality through image. It lies in a dualist approach to the question of reality, for only in such a view can a differentiation be made between reality and illusion, which allows for the tragic and absolute Cartesian doubt in the first place.

This thesis seeks to demonstrate that simulacrum is wholly implicated in the event of self-reflexivity and thus cannot indicate a collapse between reality-as-image and subject because the subject is always already the simulacrum itself. It furthermore elaborates on the necessity of simulacrum, as implicit in metaphor, and in the formation of personal narrative. It is an exploratory study, situated within the discourses of visual studies and practice-led research, but drawing on philosophical,

[15] Drawing from Potolsky's analysis of Lacan, it is implied that the unified ego is imbedded in an alienating identification with the body first and foremost which shapes the subject's relationship with things throughout one's life. The self is thus always already a fictional and mediated conception. Potolsky (2006:126) points to the primacy of the image in the construction of the subject: "The image here comes before the properly established 'I' that recognizes it, the identification before the ego that identifies, the copy before the original".

psychoanalytic and phenomenological ideas to shape its arguments. I have engaged with a variety of Baudrillard's texts, focusing on two in particular, namely *Simulacra and Simulation* (1994) and *The Perfect Crime* (1996), which are most relevant to simulacrum and hyperreality. Lacan (2001) and Sartre (2000; 2001) figure strongly in their critique of simulacrum, as do Maurice Merleau-Ponty's (1961; 1964; 2002) thoughts on embodied subjectivity[16] and perception. I also touch on Paul Ricoeur's (1978) discussions of metaphor, further developed through Stephen M. Hart's (2005) position on magic realism.

This document is divided into four distinct categories appropriate to each chapter, namely Reflection (Chapter 1); Displacement (Chapter 2); Integration (Chapter 3) and Simulacrum (Chapter 4). Each introduces a specific set of theoretical ideas, discussed through visual examples that more or less follow a chronological trajectory from the early modern period to the present. Where this trajectory is interrupted, it is to make specific points about how certain ideas can be present, or reappear, across discursive paradigms. My selection of visual examples (various forms of image-making, including film) includes examples of Baroque still-life painting and portraits, discussed in relation to Cartesian objective rationality and how a subject-object dichotomy is visually perpetuated. Examples of early modern *trompe l'œil*[17] paintings serve to show an inclination for simulacrum through mimetic representation, and how this inclination comes from a dualist approach to Reality. Iconic examples from the history of photography and cinema is contextualized as the extension of this mimetic inclination, although significantly more self-reflexive and multivalent than early modern imagery. The more contemporary examples from film and visual art serve also to reveal the intertextual and interdisciplinary nature of modern digital image culture, and identify the slow disintegration of naturalism towards the literal conflation of all 'frames' in so-called postmodern culture. I also discuss examples of materialized metaphors in Etienne van Heerden's *Toorberg* ([1986] 2008)[18], in the context of my personal practice.

What follows is a brief overview of these main areas and a review of the relevant literature in each chapter.

Chapter 1 (Reflection) traces mimetic representation from naturalism in Renaissance painting (as a proponent of a scientific approach to representation in the visual arts) to contemporary forms of

[16] Merleau-Ponty's claim that this problem of intersubjectivity "stemmed from a mistaken ascription of the self as pure, disembodied subjectivity on its own"; "the self is rather an embodied, perceptually 'thick' and fluid existence to begin with, already open to others as well as to the natural world" (Arisaka 2001:197).
[17] The term *trompe l'œil,* literally translates as "fooling the eye" (Zakia 2002:170).
[18] *Toorberg* is an Afrikaans magical realist novel by acclaimed South African writer Etienne van Heerden, first published in 1986. The story revolves around the tragic event of a farm boy called Druppeltjie who falls into a borehole on the Moolman family Karoo farm. The book traces a history of two families over a span of five generations, exploring typical postcolonial issues like race, ownership and power in pre-Apartheid South Africa. See Chapter Four for further discussion.

high definition digital image data. With reference to Baroque still lives, trompe l'œil and self-reflexivity in early modern painting, this section seeks to trace a quest for visual pictorial mimesis and illusion as parallel to the rise of modern subjectivity and Cartesian objective rationality in the West. Modernist[19] abstraction is theorized as the indirect subversion of unified subjectivity by distorting the objectification implicit in mimetic representation. The failure of modernism paves the way for what can be seen as a hyperbolic overproduction of naturalistic representation, a spectacular conflation between reality and image production (art) defined as postmodernism.

Reflection pertains to this text in two specific ways; on a mental and on a physical (appearance) level. Plato (1991:279) has warned against the mirror held up to reality. Langer (1989:xi), however, sees Plato's position as a turning away from the perceivable world. It is in this regard, Toulmin (1990:20-21) associates Descartes' position as firmly rooted in Platonic idealism and also with the second advent of modernity. Many theorists like Berman (cited in Langer 1989) have critiqued Platonic idealism as generalized and abstract ideas significantly removed from the sensible world. Langer also questions the genuine thinking equals abstraction assumption, with specific reference to what is often described as the dematerialization of the object.[20]

Cascardi (1992:125) reminds that the image of modernity, referring to the modern appeal for visual representation, is actually what defines modernity and the subject associated with this age to such an extent that the production of the image literally is modernity:

> When faced with the historical question of whether the origins of modernity may be explained with reference to any other age, Heidegger responds that the world picture does not change from an Ancient or medieval one into a modern one, but argues instead that the fact that the world becomes a picture at all is what defines subjectivity and distinguish modernity as an historical paradigm. As a result of this process, Heidegger argues, the cosmos is seen as a world of represented objects, and truth, as well as the discourses that follow from claims to truth (e.g., morality), come to be measured in terms of their adequacy to a subject who stands over against the world.

[19] Harrison (2004:6) contends that, besides referring to the notion of "being modern or up-to-date", modernism (modernist) more accurately connotes to a "position or attitude" which is marked by "specific forms of response towards both modernization and modernity". Yet, in terms of art, modernism is not to be used "as a blanket term to cover all the art of the modern period" but rather as "a form of value associated with certain works only" (Harrison 2004:6). So even though the origins of modernism is between the late 18th century and the early 20th century, the consideration of modernist elements in an artwork does not necessitate that artwork to be dated within the specified timeframe (Harrison 2004:9). A good measure for modernism in general is "a kind of intentional difference with respect to other current forms and styles and practices" (Harrison 2004:14) and is thus first and foremost marked by change and progression.

[20] Lippard (1997:viii) explains this dematerialization as it manifests in conceptual art, wherein the "idea is paramount and the material form is secondary, lightweight, ephemeral, cheap, unpretentious and/or 'dematerialized'". An object is dematerialized insofar as it is not indicative of itself by its physical manifestation of itself.

What Baudrillard (in Sarup 1993:164) identifies as simulacrum is the height of modernity and a time after World War II. However, naturalistic representation, as precursor for digital simulation of sensible reality (Kubovy 1988:17), is necessarily contemplative of reality-as-appearance. According to Smith (2004:9), this ontological element in naturalism emerged in early modernity with the rise of perspective and a scientific approach to painting. Merleau-Ponty (2002) provides revised and very relevant ideas regarding appearance and reality, consistently claiming that there is no division between appearance and reality. In a similar vein, Sartre (cited in Copleston 2003:344-345) elaborates on his idea of image-consciousness, and explains the relationship between imagination, the image and intentionality.[21] Husserl's (cited in Copleston 2003:344) idea of intentionality assumes that all consciousness "is conscious of something".

In contrast to naturalistic representation having dominated for quite some time since the Renaissance, modernist abstraction explores the ontological bond between appearance and reality anew. Harrison (2004:9) traces modernist abstraction back to Romanticism,[22] and also offers some clarity on the implication of the photographic medium on painting. But as Harrison (2004:9) finds, these abstractions in art quickly led to total disintegration of a given reality, a kind of pure objectivity. Ultimately, Gablik (1987) questions the failure of modernism, and chronicles how quickly it turned on itself. But in many ways, according to Krauss (in Lambert 2006:27), this 'nothingness' was the very goal. Modernism was doomed from the beginning, but none the less went down with a bang.

In Chapter Two (Displacement), I approach the notion of reflection, revealing how a basic reflection of sensible reality is mobilized to displace human perception as object. The development of modern transport as well as photography and film share a special bond, understood as the technological organization of the gaze, and the despatialization of the world-as-object around a central point of perceiving consciousness, or subjectivity. The effects of this "displacement of vision" (Crary 1992) on how one sees the world are vast. In more ways than one Saussure's model of the sign[23] can be seen as a consequence of this alteration, theorizing a subject as ever more severed from physical reality as a viable point of origin or anchor. Perceiving the world-in-motion, and in a directed way, heightens the feeling of being at the centre of a given world. This places considerable pressure on

[21] De Muralt (1974:3) defines intentionality as used by Husserl as the "constitutive tendency of transcendental subjectivity toward the object". In the same way the subject intends the object, so also is there a movement from the object towards the subject.

[22] Harrison (2004:9) considers the concept of Romanticism as the source wherefrom modernism constructs its aesthetic theory and furthermore notes the controversies surrounding any attempt to write about Romanticism as well as modernism.

[23] According to Ribiére (2008:23), Saussure's sign is a "double entity consisting of a form (signifier) and a meaning (signified). The signifier is the "perceptible, material, acoustic or visual signal that triggers a mental image – the signified".

reality-as-perception, and the world-in-itself, which, as physical manifestation, withdraws behind its own appearance.

Virilio's (2007) dromological[24] society theorizes the new spatiality of subjectivity, but focuses heavily on the militaristic and controlling nature of such an operation. Similar to Baudrillard's simulacrum, it is implemented primarily through technological supplementation and alteration. He does, however, provide a model for the logic of the image which differentiates between its formal logic (painting), dialectical logic (photography and film) and paradoxical logic (digital culture) (Virilio 1994:64). This chapter focuses on the dialectical logic of the image.

Charney (1995:1) assigns cinema as the definition of modern life in general, what Virilio (1994:63) calls the "frame of the nineteenth century". Gunning (1995:16) describes early cinema as the "drama of modernity" and elaborates on the collapsing of space and time through displacement of vision. Referring back to Berman (cited in Langer 1989:xi), cinema definitely represents a widening of the gap between subject and world-as-object. But in a different light, cinema also reflects back a reality that is fundamentally at odds with a dualist approach to reality. Crary (in Gunning 1995:17) notes that this technological organization of vision transforms the world into self-similar signs, a mirrored reality not legitimate in its appearance.

Christopher Nolan's film *Inception* (2010)[25] exemplifies the connections between technological reorganization of space and how this realigns (and in some cases eliminates) previously upheld divisions between inner mind and outer world, or 'real' and 'imaginary'. I refer to this film because it so vividly explores the similarities between one's mental space and narrative, and how the world is experienced through modern transportation. But we are faced with the old chicken-egg problem; is technological despatialization of space the result of the mind's reign over physical reality, and thus only manifestations of a mental reality? Or, as Baudrillard suggests, is technology distorting our understanding of space and time?

According to Cox (2006:7-8), Sartre's being-in-itself assumes the impossibility of knowing the world as it is in itself. This notion of being is thus understood as a monist-type undifferentiation which can house a dualism of both self-reflexive consciousness (being-for-itself) and an unmediated and inaccessible external world (*dasein)*. Sartre (2000) profoundly argues that the flattening out of

[24] Dromology is "the study and analysis of the impact of increasing speed of transport and communications on the development of land-use" (Virilio 1996:13; 2007). Virilio associates speed with war, and argues modern society as a war machine driven by the logic of speed (Virilio 1996:13).

[25] *Inception*'s (2010) plot revolves around a newly developed device which allows people to consciously share the same dream space. Dom Cobb, the central character, is a specialized thief who breaks into people's minds to steal information for corporate moguls. Cobb's wife, who plays the antagonist, committed suicide after having lost touch with reality during her and her husband's ventures into the subconscious and the dream space.

reality, like on the silver screen, actually overcomes the dualities which created it in the first place. So unlike Baudrillard's simulacrum, the subject is not wholly removed from the world and a re-appreciation of appearance-as-indicative does bridge the gap between in-itself and for-itself.

Chapter Three (Integration) takes an analytical approach to simulacrum and subjectivity, focusing on the virtuality and otherness of the sense of 'I' which always already resides in the subject. Integration marks the point wherein a supplementary alteration, distortion or mirror image/copy of an allocated 'reality' is reabsorbed by self-reflexive consciousness to the point wherein this alterity is eventually taken to be part of the originally allocated reality. Trifonova (2007:13) understands the spectral self (ghost in the shell) as an integration of the specular body-image within the subject. Lacan calls this the 'I', and revises Freud's (cited in Ross 2003:66) ego in a poststructuralist context. Ross (2003:66) describes the Freudian ego or the Lacanian sense of 'I' as "an image of a surface, and image, perhaps, of an image". It is in this regard Bowie (1993:92) interprets Lacan's Imaginary as the reiteration without one's life of this initial identification of the specular body-image; an understanding which also sheds light on why 'we' interact with images in such an excessive way in digital culture.

One finds self-reflexivity in early modern self-portraiture as an awareness of the constructedness of the subject, particularly through the mirror image. Mirrors were thought to stimulate subjective, contemplative and sceptical thinking; Baroque self-portraiture often hints at a very clear awareness of the link between self-reflexive consciousness and the specular body-image. This is often illustrated as a crossing between the "frames of consciousness", to use Minnisale's (2009:10) term. His idea of framing as the allocation and suppression of consciousness at a directed point in space and time ties in with integration insofar as the negation of a frame directly causes a collapse.

Huberf and Middeke (2005:8) remind us that self-reflexivity has long been found in art and is in no way exclusive to postmodernism. In fact, considering the emergence of self-reflexive consciousness in the Renaissance, its prevalence today in visual culture rather marks an intensification of this subjectivity (as subject-object dualism). And together with HD recording and display, it would rather seem that the unified subject is very much alive. At this point in time there seems to be a radical dualism and monism at work simultaneously. On the one hand a dualism perpetuated by mimetic representation, and on the other hand Baudrillard's mentalistic hyperreality, alternatively defined as postmodern surface culture. Simulacrum suggests a flip over from an intensely dualistic subject position, marked by HD and digital technology, to a hyperreality wherein the subject is no longer able to differentiate between private thoughts and images, public visual display and narratives. The

quality of the representation is crucial in such a collapse, for it must fool the eye with immaculate detail.

Crary (1992:38-39) contemplates a "certain metaphysics of interiority". With regards to this interiority, the simulacrum marks the point wherein the image synchronises perfectly with the mind. In other words, the simulacrum then becomes the point wherein external reality can just as well be a mind space, a matrix or a dream. And it is no surprise that the image might eventually conflate back into 'reality'. What other end can an image have but to collapse back? It is also no surprise postmodern surface reality has emerged considering the relentless pursuit of science (and visual representation) to peel away at reality to its core, as seen in *The Bodies Exhibition* (2005). MacDonald (2000:280) notes in Descartes' quest to find the immortal soul, which he desperately sought, he instead 'discovered' the mind. Kulstad (2003) finds a curious favour of substance-monism in Descartes, what Descartes describes as God. But with science not having detected the slightest hint to a reality behind 'appearance' (physicality in broader terms), one only has physical reality as it appears.

The final chapter (Simulacrum) explores ways in which the simulacral operation of the 'I', fundamental scepticism in modern subjectivity and a general mistrust in the appearance of a given reality prove somewhat detrimental to Baudrillard's mentalist-monism of hyperreality and arbitrary sign play. Natoli and Hutcheon (1993) and Smith (2010) provide very legitimate critiques of Baudrillard. Not only does Baudrillard's theory 'give up' on reality but also depends too much on modern technology. He underestimates reality beyond self-reflexive perception, and in so doing falls into a kind of Cartesian idealism wherein the world is only a mental simulation or substitution within the subject. It is important to maintain the world as being-in-itself (*dasein*), as Heidegger contends, and also to understand the nature of being-for-itself in terms of Being, as Sartre elaborates. He stresses that self-reflexive consciousness (being-for-itself) is first and foremost the negation of being (non-being) (Sartre 2001). To be a thinking subject, therefore, is to continually negate *dasein*, and this movement away from Pure being (Reality) is what defines human consciousness. In this regard, the inaccessibility of a signified is crucial for the development of self-reflexive consciousness. It reveals the void inside the subject as necessary, a kind of interior phenomenological non-being.

Minnisale's (2009) thoughts on consciousness as a process of framing are intriguing in context of Sartre and Heidegger's existential phenomenology:[26] self-consciousness as directed point in space

[26] Existential phenomenology has been used since the 1950s as an umbrella term referring to theories by Heidegger, Sartre and Merleau-Ponty, although none of these theorists have ever referred to themselves as such (Dreyfus & Wrathall 2005:31). Wrathall (in Dreyfus & Wrathall 2005:32) contends that all existential phenomenologists "share the view that philosophy should not be conducted from a detached, objective, disinterested, disengaged standpoint".

and time by means of 'framing', of allocating borders through differentiation. Reality, thus, as divided into rooms, registers and dimensions by the mind. The mind rebels against the idea of Reality as a single register. What is seen in René Magritte's 'The Human Condition' (1993) (fig.23), for example, is a collapse between the frames of consciousness, a collapse between the internal and external world. When reality is simulated or naturalistically represented, it frames a copy of the appearance of reality and separates it from that reality. But when one is able to simulate reality perfectly, one would be back at the start facing the same 'problem' with reality. Simulation cannot solve this problem, for Reality cannot be faked or substituted. It is not a stable 'thing' with definite characteristics. It surrenders to the mind, as Baudrillard rightfully argues.

Objects in magical realist literature, says Hart (2005:30), are required to have the potential to adopt unexpected and irrational meanings necessary for an alternate reality within the text. A moment of insignificance, wherein an object is visible but not comprehended in a cognitive and meaningful manner, is necessary for new signification to take place. A sense of *dasein* as imbedded in the physical manifestation of objects; one can see the object, but cannot comprehend it.[27]

Magic realism in visual art does not necessarily entail fantastical surrealist elements, as often found in such literature, but rather involves the potentiality of objects to be resignified. The magical realist art object is positioned in-between dualistic structures of meaning, and especially in-between meaning and non-meaning itself. In art, it is not a style like Cubism or Expressionism. It is a slippage and a resignification deeply rooted in self-reflexive consciousness.

Oliva (1999: 177) suggests that in magic realist texts, like Van Heerden's *Toorberg*, materialized metaphors are an effective strategy to conflate the metaphorical and the real. I refer extensively to *Toorberg* as my primary source for my visual art practice. I discuss the metaphor of the boreholes in *Toorberg* in context of Sartre's non-being, as a sort of black hole drawing all the characters and elements towards the final realization of their metaphorical functions within the text. In a way, the boreholes, literally, are in the holes in the text itself, 'passages' between reader and text-world.

Thiem's (2005) notion of the textualization of the reader is also of use within the bigger question of this thesis. I propose, however, that Thiem thinks too specifically about the question of a collapse between reader and text-world. To argue this, I present some thoughts around what I refer to as 'One Narrative', bound up in the notion of self-reflexive consciousness. In the present moment in

[27] The Dada readymade is an example of this strategy to unchain the object, which opens up the 'magical' possibilities of reality as given. Although outside the scope of this paper, the Dada movement's focus on the relationship between representation, technology and human identity in the early 20th century foreruns the present day postmodern digital consciousness. Particularly their celebration of the present moment and the random play of meaning in the cognitive mind paves the way for poststructuralism and other postmodern theories (Biro 2009:3).

time in which a subject interacts with anything (like a magical realist text, for example,) there is only the manifestation at the point of experience or event: the subject sitting and reading. The only world that exists (as text or otherwise) is the one the subject interacts with in this moment.

In this way, the discussion is guided towards a conclusion which draws together the various mechanisms by which simulacrum is revealed as a structural operation of self-reflexivity. Throughout this thesis, I draw attention to the construction of personal narrative and meaning, and how this process is precisely not concerned with the 'true' nature of things, but necessitates the negation of meaning in order to resignify the object-world into a truly individual experience. What metaphorical and magical realist tendencies in postmodern art and literature show, is that the individual subject, with the capacity for emotion and narrative agency, is necessarily inclined to not see things as they are, instead fleeing from *dasein* and materializing the metaphor.

Chapter One

Reflection: Naturalism and Objective Rationality in Early-Modern Imagery

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The camera obscura performs an operation of individuation; that is, it necessarily defines an observer as isolated, enclosed, and autonomous within its dark confines. It impels a kind of askesis, or withdrawal from the world, in order to regulate and purify one's relation to the manifold contents of the now 'exterior' world. Thus the camera obscura is inseparable from a certain metaphysic of interiority: it is a figure for both the observer who is nominally a free sovereign individual and a privatized subject confined in a quasi-domestic space, cut off from a public exterior world (Crary 1992:38-39).

◊

In this chapter I explore a connection between Cartesian objective rationality and naturalism in painting evident in the history of Western representational practices since the Renaissance. I furthermore draw a parallel between this specific history and the popularization of the idea of an individual subject, in other words, a person understood as a separate and rational entity. I aim to demonstrate how the act of picturing the world is both constitutive of, as well as a consequence of subjectivity with reference to a selection of paintings dated from the Renaissance period through to the end of modernism. I thus also suggest that abstraction of form is the subversion of the unified subject.

I will demonstrate the link between subjectivity, naturalism and Cartesian objective rationality by emphasizing a distinct self-reflexive trait in early modern naturalistic paintings. This reflexivity pertains to subjectivity (self-awareness) as well as to the act of imaging or representing. It is thus according to these requirements I have selected visual examples so that the link between subjectivity and the act of visually representing the human body or the world is clearly expressed.

In context of the larger scope of this text, this chapter serves to clarify on the interaction between a perceiving subject, this subject's sense of self or subjectivity, and the image. Baudrillard's notion of the simulacrum is inextricably tied to a subject's perception of the sensible world. I therefore consider it of vital importance to allocate the operation of simulacrum as it occurs in the subject's interaction with the world. As I insist throughout this text, simulacrum is specifically a matter of judgment (of sensible reality) on part of the mind, and not something created or produced in the

physical world. I consider simulations in the world to be but metaphors for the simulacral operation of the mind.

Colin Richards' (1998; 2003) work provides a retrospect of this interaction between objective rationalism, Enlightenment subjectivity and representation of the world-as-object. Richards' reference to the taxonomic process of classification and illustration associated with modern discourse is relevant to my central argument insofar as he not only subverts this type of discourse, but also reveals a kind of formal seduction in its complexity and functioning. Naturalism, and especially trompe l'œil in early modern painting, evident in David Tenier's 'The Archduke Leopold's Willliam in his Gallery in Brussels' (1647) (fig.6) and Pere Bordell del Caso's 'Escaping Criticism' (1874) (fig.8), entertains ideas around the mind's reception of visual information. I consider this to be a distinct awareness of the illusionistic nature of reality. Thus ideas of simulacrum, originally contemplated by Plato, are prominent in image culture throughout modernity up to the present day (as discussed in the subsequent chapters).

In line with the broader focus of this paper, I relink the idea of simulacrum directly with the development of the mental capacity of a human subject as opposed to associating it with the effects of representational technologies like television or photography (Baudrillard and Virilio), which now appears in digital high definition. In contrast to the verisimilitude found in naturalist painting, I discuss Robert Rauschenberg's 'White Painting' (1951) (fig.12) as the absolute subversion of naturalist representation, and accordingly, also the idea of Enlightenment subjectivity.

◊

In context of Platonic-Cartesian-Hegelian idealism, Langer (1989:ix) notes that "the search for truth requires a turning away from the world of our concrete experience, as Plato's cave allegory would have us believe".[28] In light of this turning away from the concrete world, Toulmin (1990:20) links the second advent of modernity with the scientists and philosophers of the 17th century who affiliated themselves with the Platonic dialectic.[29] Whereas Aristotle's theory and practice favored rational analysis, Plato achieved quasi-geometrical certainty by way of theoretical arguments (Toulmin

[28] LaPrade (2007:40) notes that Plato's cave allegory contemplates the nature of truth: "Life on earth is comparable to being in a dark cave devoid of all sunlight. A fire is lit behind the people in the cave, who then see shadows on the inside wall of the cave. Likewise, people on earth see only shadows of the truth rather than the truth itself. If one emerged from the cave into the sunlight, one would see the truth, not just shadows of the truth". Plato's analogy assumes a natural relationship between light, as truth, and darkness, as illusion.

[29] Toulmin (1990:24) notes that, "[b]efore 1600, theoretical inquiries were balanced against discussions of concrete practical issues", which thus implies a shift in rational thinking in a matter of a hundred years. With the 17th century rationalists, like Descartes and Galileo, the balance between "local, time bound practice, and universal, timeless theory" sway completely towards decontextualized, universal and abstract philosophy. How these ideas shaped the human subject throughout modernity is vital to understanding how the postmodern subject is figured.

1990:20). Descartes, and those who followed him, would eventually change the very language of Reason by formal theory (Toulmin 1990:20). With 17th century science and philosophy, as rooted in Platonic idealism, it was fashionable to formulate theories and questions independent of context (Toulmin 1990:21). Thus, in the quest for eternal truth and absolute knowledge, there lies a radical abstraction of experience.

Descartes' objective rationality, as a mental operation, locates a consciousness as both in the world and removed from it. In light of this Cartesian subject position, Berman (quoted in Langer 1989:xi) reads a word of warning in Merleau-Ponty's essay 'Eye and Mind' (1960) on operational thinking:

> [T]o set out to construct man and history on the basis of a few abstract indices […] we enter into […] a sleep, or a nightmare, from which there is no awakening […]. [A] thinking which looks on from above, and thinks of the object-in-general, must return to the 'there is' which underlies it; to the site, the soil of the sensible and opened world such as it is in our life and for our body.

In the abovementioned citation, Berman provides the crucial link between abstract thinking and a radical objective world view. In other words, he reveals abstract thinking as the cause for objectivity which, in turn, manifests as naturalistic representations of objects. This early modern adoration for the object is perhaps most apparent in Renaissance still life paintings. Michelangelo Merisi da Caravaggio's 'Still Life with Fruit' (1601-1605) (fig.1) is the epitome of this objectivity in the way he represents these everyday objects so realistically. Shifted into the aesthetic ambit, the fruit-objects are elevated beyond their typical function, acquiring an ornamental quality. So there is a transition from the organic to the plastic or from the functional to the ornate. The loss of an object's typical functionality, which gives it meaning as an object, indicates a collapse into dissemblance, for its appearance is painstakingly reproduced but its purpose or meaning is potentially negated. In this case, the painted fruit-object is an abstraction of its previous existence; one can still see the object clearly and also grasp its typical function, only now it is essentially useless.

This scientific devotion to objectivity is perhaps more obvious in Hans Holbein's 'The Ambassadors' (1533) (fig.2). In the picture, "Jean de Dinteville, the French Ambassador to England, and his friend, George de Selve, Bishop of Lavaur" (Butler 1998:226) is composed beside an array of musical, astronomical and also scientific instruments which possibly connote to their knowledge and wisdom. Moreover, these objects serve as apparatuses for measuring the world according to the Quadrivium

of the medieval university.[30] Thus, instruments used for the purpose of converting the world into object as exemplified by the terrestrial and celestial globes significantly placed on the upper and lower shelves. Holbein's painting is dated around the time Toulmin associates with the first advent of modernity in the 16th century and perhaps we find some of the ideals upheld in the first phase in Holbein.

Toulmin (1990:27) notes that the writers linked to the first humanist phase thought it better to "suspend judgment about matters of general theory, and to concentrate on accumulating a rich perspective, both on the natural world and on human affairs, as we encounter them in our actual experience". More importantly, although "the rational possibilities of human experience was one chief merit of the Renaissance humanists, […] they also had a delicate feeling for the *limits* of human experience" (Toulmin 1990:27). This suggests a humbleness which quickly dissipated by the second phase a century later. I read this respect for uncertainty and human limitation in the anamorphic skull (fig.3) placed in the foreground of 'The Ambassadors'. This object reminds the viewer of the transience of human existence and, in being an anamorphism, of the subjective and limited nature of our perception.

In Colin Richards' work, 'Blood, Stone with White Vein' (2003) (fig.4), a colour image of a partial skull with a nameless tag is suspended alongside a pen and ink sketch of a bleeding stone. Having formally practiced as a medical illustrator, Richards' current occupation as curator, theorist, art historian and critic also greatly contributes to his art practice which is often concerned with the 'scientific' representation of objects (Lamprecht 2003:1). In other words, representations as a taxonomic process with a compulsion to name, divide, classify and illustrate the natural world. Richards (quoted in Lamprecht 2003:1) notes that illustration "is a hinge between the linguistic and the visual"; or in other words, exemplary of the association between text and the image. It is this mutual bond which aligns both forms of representation with the notion of abstraction.

The notion that "genuine thinking must be abstract" (Langer 1989:xi) not only marks the "turning away from the world of our concrete experience" (Langer 1989:ix), but also the gradual dematerialization of the object. On Richards' skull-object a clue is clearly provided, for what other meaning does a tag-less string have than the lack of designation or name? Richards points to the skull as object; as image, ripped from a specific context, if ever it possessed one to begin with. That the rock is set apart from the skull and background, in being an ink drawing (painstakingly rendered), further supports the notion of object-ness and how this relates to imaging. He suggests that

[30] The Quadrivium served as the foundation for theoretical and exact sciences for university students in the medieval period and thereafter and typically comprised of a combination of arithmetic, geometry, astronomy and music (Grant 1998:44).

objectivity tries to 'tap blood from a stone', which has, as of yet, not been accomplished. Imaging, therefore, as the visual manifestation of objectivity, simultaneously substitutes and murders the 'real' object. And so the tears of blood not only serve as a reference to the figure of speech used by Richards, but also suggest a violent loss associated with objectivity and the very process of imaging in general.

In Richards' 'Homunculus' (1998) (fig.5) modern anatomical imagery is used in a self-consciously playful manner; scientific imaging as turning on itself. What would otherwise be a dissected wedge of the male pelvis, now possibly alludes to the castration complex or to the objectification and fragmentation of the human body by medical dissecting methods. Or stated more dramatically, logos castrating itself. The title refers to a miniature human body believed by early modern medical theories to be living in the spermatozoon (Dictionary.com 2010. Sv. 'homunculus').

According to Richards (quoted in Lamprecht 2003:1),

> [t]he things which animate [his] writing are not so different from those which animate [his] art making": "My deep interest in the power of images attest to this […]. Clearly, to grapple with the unruly dynamics of power – the power of seduction, exclusion, coercion, complicity, liberation oppression – requires a willingness to abstract and generalize in the moment.

In this statement, Richards addresses a central dilemma of the artist in a postmodern environment, for in the process of critiquing modernity as a body of visual and textual renderings, the artist makes use of the same strategies of seduction and exclusion employed by modern discourse and imaging. So even though the postmodern artist might aspire to subvert ideologies from a past, there is always an inevitable act of exclusion, abstraction and generalization.

◊

Self-reflexivity, in the literal and figurative sense, is *the* fundamental feature of consciousness as associated with modernity. The abundance of self-reflexive models in contemporary visual culture, despite the influence of postmodernism, does not seem to mark a break with modernity in any way. If anything, it marks a hyperbolic overproduction of discourse, or reflexivity, which is of course one and the same. To illustrate this, I consider the reflexive elements in David Tenier's 'The Archduke Leopold William in his Gallery in Brussels' (1647) (fig.6), a 17th century painting which demonstrates a game of signs that mimic contemporary interest in hyper-intertextuality. The gallery is filled salon-style with a plethora of famous paintings, meticulously represented by Tenier. A simulacral space is set-up; a copy of a space filled with copies of a reality already mediated by myths and narratives – the referential decay is manifold, and it becomes self-reflexive of representation by imaging other

existing paintings. An infinite space is implied insofar as the paintings bleed beyond the margins of Tenier's image. Most significant, however, is the tension, or lack thereof, between the figures in the paintings and the Duke with his entourage; they appear on a similar 'plane'. After all, they are also just figures in a painting, and the Duke is as much a 'simulacrum' as the represented figures in his gallery exactly because of this equivalence. Note that the Duke only qualifies as a simulacrum within the parameters of the painting and not in the true sense of the word. Similarly Tenier's image is not a simulacrum but a painting about the simulacral implications in the act of picturing the world.

Dated around the time Toulmin (1990:43) associates with the advent of modernity, Tenier's image reveals some insights into the initial objectives of modernity. One cannot be sure whether Tenier is critical or supportive of collapse between reality and representation, but that he recognizes the simulacral nature of early modern representation is certain.

Sarup (1993:164) notes that Baudrillard's third order of simulacrum applies to the Western culture "formed *after* the Second World War" and concerns the reformation of "advertising, media, information and communication networks" into "models, codes, simulacra, spectacles and the hyper-realism of 'simulation'".[31] And yet, the idea of simulacrum goes as far back as Plato and seems to be explored in early modern artworks like in Tenier's. If Heidegger is correct to think modernity as a *consequence* of transforming the world into image and discourse, as Cascardi (1992:125) argues, and not the other way around, it is irrational to suggest the dawn of a new era now that this transformation seems to manifest to such an extreme degree. With this in mind, I fail to see how digital imaging technology and information substantially moves away from the early modern devotion to naturalistic representation and the production of knowledge.

Smith (2004:8-9) provides an account of this crucial link between early modernity and simulacrum:

> Naturalism emerges […] at moments of most intense artisanal self-assertion, and in early modern Europe, artisans employed naturalism in order to make claims about their status as active knowers […] One of the most striking changes that occurred in the Renaissance was the development of visual perspective and the striving to imitate nature more precisely […] to create a more effective illusion of perceived reality.

This advancement in visual perspective marks the early stages of a progression from representation to simulation in painting, for whereas the world would otherwise be copied according to its visible

[31] Debord (1983:no.6) explains that the spectacle should be understood as "both the result and the goal of the dominant mode of production […] [i]t is the very heart of this society's unreality. In all of its particular manifestations – news, propaganda, advertising, entertainment – the spectacle represents the dominant *model* of life".

qualities it is now reproduced by means of an abstract coordinate system[32] (fig.7). In context of early modern painting, Summers (cited in Smith 2004:9) defines naturalistic representation as "the attempt to make the elements of the artworks […] coincide with the elements of the optical experience". Accordingly, Kubovy (1988:17) identifies the means by which the "artists-scientists of the Renaissance" attains this illusion: "They had to define the very concept of taking a picture, to understand the optics implied by this definition, to abstract the geometry underlying the optics, and finally to discover ways of translating these abstractions into practical rules of thumb that everyone could apply". The notion of artists-scientists is of particular importance to the evolution of the image in modernity. Smith (2004:17) explains that, with the Scientific Revolution[33], the "Aristotelian scheme of knowledge", which divides theory (*episteme* or *scientia*) and practice (*praxis* or *experientia*), is "turned inside out, and the production of effects and real things came to prove the certainty of a theory". What the new philosophy of a practiced based science meant for painting in particular is the idea that "'scientific' knowledge […] could be extracted from nature, and that the imitation of nature yielded productive knowledge"[34] (Smith 2004:20). This scientific approach to especially naturalistic painting marks a newfound power of art over a given reality; not only "that art can be a model of vision and perception" (Smith 2004:23), but that art can deceive by means of this model.

◊

Let us turn our attention to the effects of early-modern commitment to scientific perspective and naturalism, in particular trompe l'œil. In Juan Sánchez Cotán's 'Still Life with Quince, Cabbage, Melon, and Cucumber' (1602) (fig.8), the longstanding tradition of the still life exemplifies the progress in art made possible by this scientific approach; the clean cut window sill indicating the abstract coordinate space from which the hyper-realistic vegetable-objects seem to protrude in three dimensions. With 17th century naturalist painting, the objectification associated with the abstract thinking of the second phase manifests on a visual level; the object is represented as a

[32] The abstract coordinate system implemented by the Renaissance artist-scientist paved the way for 3D computer graphics software like 3ds Max and AC3D which is used to create detailed three-dimensional models or animations for film, television, video games and even architecture design (Wikipedia The Free Encyclopedia 2010. Sv. '3D computer graphics software'.).

[33] With reference to Hooykaas' research on the Scientific Revolution, Hellyer (2003:17) identifies the two developments thought to have instigated this progression, namely the Portuguese travellers' discovery of the New World as well as the "transition from an organic view of the world to a mechanical one". The latter entails a study of nature that is mathematical; that is, nature understood as a complex machine.

[34] Sarup (1993:135) notes that Lyotard makes a distinction between scientific knowledge and a conflicting different kind of knowledge he calls narrative. Whereas narrative, in reference to popular stories, myths, legends and tales, determine "a community's relationship to itself and its environment", the scientific makes use of the "abstract, denotative or logical and cognitive procedures generally associated with science". Furthermore, that it is "impossible to judge the existence or validity of narrative knowledge on the basis of scientific knowledge and vice versa" because the "relevant criteria is different" (Sarup 1993:136).

standing unit, suspended in a space almost independent of context. The focus is clearly on technique and achieving an illusory effect by means of this technique. Incredible detail and the illusion of volume means that the represented object now intimidates the object-in-general in aspiring to be confused, even for a moment, with the real thing. Not that the naturalistic image-object necessarily qualifies as a simulacrum, but that this object exposes naturalism in painting as the early-modern impulse to substitute the world of objects seems viable.

Cotán's still life thus falls under trompe l'œil, which refers to artworks wherein two-dimensional images are rendered so realistically so as to appear three-dimensional (Zakia 2002:170). Zakia (2002:170) notes that "[c]reating illusionistic images have a long recorded history that began in ancient Greece[35] and extends to the sophisticated computer imagining we witness today". Despite the developments in imaging techniques throughout modernity it seems that the 'trompe l'œil impulse', so to speak, has been synonymous with modern representation all the way.

A conspicuous similarity between Pere Borrell del Caso's 'Escaping Criticism' (1874) (fig.9) and a still frame from Gore Verbinski's horror film, The Ring (2002) (fig.10), suggests that the trompe l'œil impulse is as enticing as it was a century ago.[36] So whereas Del Caso's painting implements naturalistic techniques to achieve this deception, Verbinski's image only uses the idea (the impulse) as it is not a naturalistic representation. Del Caso's image makes use of the picture frame as the indication for the divide between a given reality and supplementary reality in the way Verbinski implements the television frame. In both cases the strategy relies on the presupposition that a distinction exits between the two realms so as to subvert vision in the most obvious manner. Both Del Caso and Verbinski's images thus function because the viewer can presume such a difference, and furthermore, that s/he would typically accept the given reality as more 'real' than the other.

Why both images might produce a feeling of the uncanny in the viewer, or at least a slight uneasiness, concerns the way the other reality effortlessly penetrates the 'real' reality. What is important here is not the question of whether another reality actually exists, but rather that the viewer reads a two-dimensional image (the scene in the painting or on the television screen) as an unreality, and furthermore, that this unreality can manifest as threatening or haunting. If the term 'reality' is thought to refer to 'all that exists', whether physical and/or mental, temporal or abstract, then surely there is nothing unreal about a two-dimensional image as it also occupies a space like

[35] Zakia (2002:170) refers to an incident of rivalry between the Greek painters Zeuxis and Parrhasius as told by the Roman scholar Pliny. The story claims that Zeuxis, who painted a still life of grapes so realistic that birds tried to peck at it, was defeated by Parrhasius' talent, for when Zeuxis wished to draw the curtain in order to reveal his rival's painting he realized the drapery was in fact the painting itself.

[36] My term, the 'trompe l'œil impulse', only refers to the desire for illusion effect and not necessarily to the formal strategies implemented to achieve such an effect.

any other object or thing. The notion of illusion (or 'unreality') can therefore only be located within the operation of perception, and not in the bigger context of Reality.

On the relationship between perception and illusion, Merleau-Ponty (2002:343) provides some degree of clarification:

> It has often been said that consciousness, by definition, admits of no separation of appearance and reality: if I think I see or feel, I indubitably see or feel, whatever maybe true of the external object. Here reality appears in its entirety, real being and appearance are one, and there is no reality other than the appearance. If this is true, there is no possibility that illusion and perception should have the same appearance that my illusions should be perceptions with no object or my perceptions true hallucinations… A true perception will simply be true perception. Illusion will be no perception at all.

Merleau-Ponty seems to suggest that there is no viable way we can really identify an illusion because we can only really know reality as perceived. And since anything we are aware of in some way is a perception, whether in the mind or otherwise, the question of illusion is impossible, except for the fact that we can continue to ask that question. It is impossible, for there must be a reason why we can ask that question in the first place.

Does this suggest that illusion has something to do with the way we simulate the appearance of perceived reality to ourselves through the image? In other words, fooling our perception by simulating perspective or depth on a two-dimensional surface? When you stare at a naturalistic photograph for a while and then close your eyes, the scene in the photograph will be three-dimensionally reconstructed in the mind if you try to imagine it again. This, I suggest, is exactly how we fool ourselves; images are reconstructed in the multidimensional space of the imagination. Illusion is all about sneaking the artificial image into the mind.

Following Sartre, Copleston (2003:344-5) explains the relation between the image and the imagination:

> Imagination, as a form of consciousness, is intentional. It has its own characteristics… Perception posits its object as existent; but the imagining consciousness… can posit its object as non-existent… [J]ust as perception intends an object posited as transcendent and not a mental content… so does the imagining consciousness intend an object other than the image as image… the image is not the intended object but a relation between consciousness and its object… For the actual imaging consciousness the image is the way in which consciousness

> posits an unreal object as non-existing. It does not posit the image as an image; it posits unreal objects.

So in the case of imagining something or someone that actually exists as well as in the case of imagining that which doesn't exist, there is always an intentional object (even in the case of a non-existent object imagined) beyond the image. In the same way that "[a]ll consciousness, as Husserl has shown, is consciousness *of* something" (Copleton 2003:344), the naturalistic image can only be defined as a deferral or redirection towards something else (whether real or imaginary), or a relation between consciousness and a transcendent object. This deferral is most efficient when the image is a naturalistic photograph or video insofar as the image attempts to picture a given reality truthfully. Note, however, that the supposed 'natural' correlation between signifier and signified in realism is as constructed as any other style in visual culture, even though it might appear as "a 'styleless' or transparent style, as a mere simulacrum or mirror image of visual reality" (Wells 2003:252). And yet, it is only with a naturalistic photographic/video image that the image-ness is effectively masked, wherein the image almost becomes non-existent in comparison to an abstract picture.

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With modernism in the visual arts the relationship between the object-in-general, its representation and the role of the image, as always embedded in this process, radically changes. This is mainly due to a break and departure from the dominance of naturalist representation in painting already evident in Romanticism, and clearly marked by the emergence of Cubism[37] after 1907 (Harrison 2004:9). However, this break from naturalism in the arts does not necessarily mark a denunciation of naturalistic representation in visual culture. Wells (2003:254) explains that "[i]t is a truism that photography 'released' painting from its responsibility for literal depiction, allowing it to become more experimental. The developing relationship between the two media was considerably more symbiotic".[38]

Joseph Nicéphore Niépce's photograph 'View from the Window at Le Gras' (circa 1826) (fig.11), considered one of the earliest photographic prints,[39] is a far cry from the digital images we know today. The depiction is significantly abstract and doesn't as of yet hold any threat to a given reality or even a naturalistic painting. What holds the threat, even in the case of Niépce, is the technical

[37] Greenberg (cited in Harrison 2004:9) regards Cubism as "the epoch-making feat of twentieth-century art, a style that has changed and determined the complexion of Western art as radically as Renaissance naturalism once did".
[38] On the symbiotic relationship between photography and art, Wells (2003:254) mentions photography's aid in portraiture painting, the re-presenting of art objects, also drawing attention to the compositional and perspectival similarities it shares with drawing and painting.
[39] Wells (2003:49) notes that Niépce and Daguerre made important discoveries in the early 1820s which lead to the first publicly announced photographic process called the daguerreotype.

aspect of the photographic process; the fact that visible reality can now be mechanically reproduced. French critic Ettiene-Jean Delécluze (1781-1863) (cited in Marien 2006:77) viewed photography as "a science imposing its mode of dogged imitation on art", much in the same vein as British critic Francis Palgrave (1788-1861) (quoted in Marien 2006:76) who wrote that the "[s]team-engine and furnace, the steel plate, the roller, the press, the Daguerreotype, the Voltaire battery, and the lens, are the antagonistic principles of art". The cynicism in Delécluze and Palgrave might concern the seemingly autonomous nature of photography; after artists have been painstakingly reproducing reality through painting, a scientific process is developed that can do the same in an instant. So besides Wells' (2003:254) assertion that photography is not simply to be held liable for the departure from naturalistic representation in art, photography definitely played a major role in this transition. And yet, that a scientific process exists to copy reality in this way also justifies the modern quest for mimetic picturing; the impulse to copy reality is inherent in reality because it has been 'discovered' by scientific inquiry. A fundamental truth if you will.

The demise of naturalism in art characteristic of the modernist movements is without a doubt a consequence of this new technical medium. Wells (2003:254) suggests that "photography encouraged the Impressionist painters to experiment with manners of painting which could also capture a sense of the moment, and the passage of light". Now that photography proves more effective than conventional methods in "capturing likenesses" (Wells 2003:254), art practice is definitely 'released' from its longstanding purpose of "literal depiction" (Wells 2003:254). What follows is nothing short of an intellectual and conceptual explosion in the arts, broadly defined as a dedication to new and challenging ideas concerning representation and imaging. Harrison (2004:9) explains the most unambiguous characteristics of modernism:

> It is normal to associate the modern in art with a breakdown of the traditional decorum in Western culture that previously connected the appearance of works of art to the appearance of the natural world. The typical symptoms of this breakdown are a tendency for the shapes, colours and materials of art to lead a life of their own, forming unusual combinations, offering distorted or exaggerated versions of the appearance of nature and, in some cases, losing all obvious connection to the ordinary objects of our visual experience.

Of particular relevance here are the instances wherein the link between the picture and the recognizable external world is wholly effaced as one would find in modernist abstract painting. To a certain extent, the intentional object becomes problematic, and attention is drawn to the artificiality and general constructed-ness of the image. Abstract artist Kasimir Malevich (quoted in Harrison 2004:49) claims that "in [their] era of Cubism the artist has destroyed objects together with their

meaning, essence and purpose […]. Objects have vanished like smoke, for the sake of the new culture of art". But to what extent can it be argued that this "pure plasticity", as artist Piet Mondrian (quoted in Harrison 2004:49) calls it, negates the object all together? And perhaps more importantly, can abstract art, even if for a moment, negate consciousness altogether when it is viewed? Even though the viewer might experience some form of spiritual nothingness when viewing a purely abstract work of art, this cannot be substantially verified and remains *sub judice*. However, what can be verified in context of abstract painting is that the intentional object shifts from its usual position 'outside' the representation, as with naturalistic pictures, to the 'there and now'. In the way consciousness always posits an intentional object, the viewer might become aware of the painterly qualities, the texture and hues of the painted surface. The painting 'itself' might thus become the intentional object.

Greenberg (quoted in Harrison 2004:19) explicates the differences between modernist and pre-modernist representation:

> Realistic, naturalistic art had dissembled the medium, using art to conceal art; Modernism used art to call attention to art. The limitations that constitute the medium of painting – the flat surface, the shape of the support, the properties of the pigment – were treated by the Old Masters as negative factors… Under Modernism these same limitations came to be regarded as positive factors… Whereas one tends to see what is in an Old Master before one sees the picture itself, one sees a Modernist picture as a picture first.

Malevich's claim about the disappearance of the object holds a degree of merit, although not exactly in terms of a total destruction of the object. In light of the object-subject configuration on which Cartesian rationalism insists it might be true to suggest that abstract works of art destabilize the unified subject by denying the perspective "which looks on from above, and thinks of the object-in-general" (Berman quoted in Langer 1989: xi). With the repositioning of the intentional object, abstract art possibly marks a "return to the 'there is'; […] the soil of the sensible and opened world such as it is in our life and for our body" (Berman quoted in Langer 1989: xi). Malevich (quoted in Harrison 2004:50) states what can be considered as a rationale behind the kind of 'spiritual'[40] approach adopted by many of the Purists: "Our world of art has become a new, non-objective, pure".

[40] In this context the word 'spiritual' refers to the opposite of scientific objectivity and Cartesian rationalism, thus, an experience of consciousness that denies a subject/object dichotomy.

This supposed purity attained by rejecting objective rationalism and naturalistic representation seems appealing in light of the problem of Cartesian disembodied subjectivity.[41] But the modernists have failed. In the current digital image culture, naturalistic representation is in full bloom. From the instantaneous and point to point reproduction of reality by the digital camera, to the unsurpassed quality of digital high definition television; commercialization of this type of imaging only seems to fulfil the pre-modernist dream for naturalistic representation. Why modernism seems to have failed in, at least this regard, is not an easy question to answer. That it might rather have something to do with the general ideals of modernism 'as a whole', rather than with the variety of challenging ideas explored by the modernists, is probably a good place to start. Gablik (1987:115-116) assesses the ideals of modernism in order to explain why it ultimately failed:

> Once art began its relentless advance into traditionlessness, every new style served as a new beginning, a new plunge ahead. Beliefs had to be continually changed, replaced, discarded – always in favour of newer and better ones, which would only be rejected in turn… But what the early modernists failed to foresee… was that such a conception of history could only be built on sand, since no such belief ever had anything solid to support it.

It was only a matter of time before the progressive (and similarly destructive) ideals of modernism buckled in on itself. This theoretical implosion is best embodied by Robert Rauschenberg's 'White Painting' (1951) (fig.12) series. Lambert (2006:28) thinks "[w]e can speak of abstract art, then, as the result of purification leading to paradox: the nothing that becomes everything, the repository of ultimate Being – whether Hegelian or Platonic". Krauss (cited in Lambert 2006:27) elaborates on this notion:

> The Twentieth century's first wave of pure abstraction was based on the goal, taken very seriously indeed, to make a work about Nothing […] The ambition finally to succeed at painting nothing is fired by the dream of being able to paint Nothing, which is to say, all Being once it has been stripped of every quality that would materialize or limit it in any way. So purified, this Being is identical with nothing.

In terms of the image, 'White Painting' is probably as effective when viewed on Google Images as it was when exhibited in the 1950s, although in a different manner. That the painting requires the surrounding environment to be pictured in order to be clearly recognized as such, reveals the deferring quality of the work; not necessarily a "[b]eing identical with nothingness" (Krauss cited in

[41] Arisaka (2001:197) explains that the problem with the cogito, which is the radical division between a ghostly mind and a mechanical body, is that "there seems to be no adequate way of explaining how such private minds can share a world and themselves".

Lambert 2006:27) if ever there is such a consciousness, but definitely a potentially empty deferral. Especially when Rauschenberg's image is represented, this becomes apparent – the white square remains a constant point of negation and to a certain extent evades the effects of referential decay; the threadlike lines crossing the canvasses being the only markers 'that there is actually something there'. 'White Painting' also functions as a rediscovery of a reality beyond representation, a renunciation of representation. Strickland (quoted in Obendorf 2009:24) observes the interactive quality of the work: "I always thought of the white painting as being, not passive, but very-well, hypersensitive… so that one could look at them and almost see how many people were in the room by the shadows cast, or what time of day it was". As a precursor to minimalist painting,[42] Rauschenberg's imagery exits very close to what can be called a representational singularity, a nullification of representation. It is for this reason that Rauschenberg's minimalist paintings is often read as an analogy for modernism's demise.[43]

On the question of whether modernism has failed, Gablik (1987:11) responds with yet another question: "Are we leaving behind us a period of success and resonant creativity, or one of impoverishment and decline?" Since Rauschenberg clearly marks the opposite extreme of naturalist representation, minimalist painting can indeed be viewed as the successful completion of the assault on naturalism. Logically, it thus also marks the end or demise of this quest. In this regard, then, it is impossible to answer Gablik's million dollar question simply because modernism cannot be viewed as a single, revolutionary and progressive movement with specifically defined goals – a set of goals being the necessary criteria for the question of failure. The disintegration of naturalism in art, as Harrison (2004:9) observes, is the only obvious connection between the various modernisms in art, simply because all the isms were reactionary and contradictory in relation to each other. And now that the postmodern is primarily identified by pluralism, Gablik (1987:11) asks whether "it is merely the effect of what Hegel called the bad infinite – which claims to comprehend everything but is, in reality, a false complexity that merely covers up a lack of meaning". This complexity or pluralism might be ascribed to the ever-present craving for the new in modernism which, having reached the representational degree zero, now attempts to envelop all modernisms, and also that which came before it, as one. As a result of this absolute assimilation, art has also lost all its parameters to the extent that "we are willing to consider *anything* as art" (Gablik 2003:11). It is because of this absolute assimilation that Gablik (1987:117) sees the so-called postmodern artist returning to pre-modernist and modernist traditions, simply borrowing from the past.

[42] Obendorf (2009:23) notes that Malevich and Rauschenberg produced the first minimalist paintings in the 1950s.
[43] Levin (quoted in Obendorf 2009:22) claims that minimalism is "the last of the modernist styles" and thus marks the "transition between the modern and the postmodern".

Modernism's dismantling of the naturalistic image is first and foremost a disruption of the type of subjectivity which is summoned by such a representation. In the same way the Lacanian 'I' is maintained by the reflection in the mirror, so also is the unified subject perpetuated though naturalistic representations. What Rauschenberg and many of the modernists achieved was not only to question and disrupt this subject formation, but also to draw attention to the image itself, and how the constructed and illusionistic nature of the image is often overlooked. And to a certain extent this endeavour was successful, if only because they received the recognition they deserved. However, the rapid development and inevitable commercialization of the photographic medium couldn't exactly be matched by anything in the art sector. Wells (2001:83) writes that "photography was seen as part of a new machine age, essentially a modern way of seeing. Photography, thus, had come to seem socially progressive, not confined by the precepts and preoccupations of more traditional fine arts". This 'modern way of seeing' very much developed out of the view offered by pre-modernist naturalistic paintings, similarly "bound up with the possibilities of disembodied vision that it provides, the spatio-temporal distances it spans, the claims to objectivity it authorizes" (Mcquire 1998:2). It is the commercialization of a worldview established in modernity and which goes against everything modernism aimed to accomplish in the first place.

It is only now, in late- or postmodernity, that we experience the fulfilment of what modernity set out to do in the first place, that is, converting the world into picture. This is perhaps most obvious with television, which has effectively infiltrated the private, domestic space of the secular subject, and accordingly, the mind or imagination of this subject.

Chapter Two

Displacement: From World-image to World-scene

You're waiting for a train. A train that will take you far away. You know where you hope this train will take you. But you can't know for sure. But it doesn't matter - because we'll be together (Nolan 2010).

If you are willing to take a mirror and carry it around everywhere, quickly you will make the sun and the things in heaven; quickly the earth; and quickly yourself and the other animals and implements and plants and everything else that was just now mentioned (*Plato 1991:279).*

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In this chapter I reflect on Virilio's theory of dromology, better known as a cultural model of speed, as it pertains to the notion of subjectivity in the contemporary world. However, my approach to this model does not follow Virilio's emphasis on war and militarization, but rather contemplates how the reorganization of the vision by modern transportation has altered our perception of both the mental and the material world. I suggest cinema and other visual media, better understood as a 'realtime' network of screens and information, have two possible effects on our idea of subjectivity. On the one hand, this reorganization of the gaze causes a disembodied state of being by displacing the viewer's vision. On the other hand, this matrix of image transmission changes our notion of perception and the sensible world, and the understanding of the world-as-image alters our understanding of the connection between conceptual dualisms like mental and material, or internal and external. In other words, the effect of surface-image culture also reveals interconnectedness between the mental and the material registers of reality.

Essentially, the correlation between cinema and the train-ride experience in the 19th century very much concerns a 'flight from reality'. Literal displacement of vision in this manner amputates an external world, as it is to our bodies, from the mind. It amputates an experience of a given reality as a whole, as a scene with a fragmented narrative, insofar modern transportation literally fragments the world one perceives into sequences or frames.

I will demonstrate the relationship between speed and subjectivity with reference to examples from film wherein such interplay is encountered.

The phantom ride camera in early travel film actualities exemplify the displacement of vision which lies at the heart of the cinematic image. However, director David Lynch's use of this camera view in

Lost Highway (1997) (fig.13) is overtly sinister, and rather speaks of confusion, isolation and psychological distress. I also discuss Alfred Hitchcock's *Strangers on a Train* (1951) (fig.15) and Christopher Nolan's *Inception* (2010) (fig.16) with regards to the connection between subjectivity and speed in the contemporary world. Nolan's multidimensional world put forth in *Inception* is of particular interest to me because it assumes a viewer who can make sense of a fragmented and contradictory narrative. Moreover, a viewer who 'accepts' the multidimensional model of reality as illustrated in the film. All the above mentioned examples illustrate a flight through and from sensible reality, and consider the implications of speed on a mentalistic level.

In the section titled 'The external world' I bring into focus the philosophical ideas of intentionality or *dasein* (Sartre) as it relates to the understanding of an external world beyond human comprehension. I use the analogy of the sticker to convey how intentionality towards the world (as object) masks the in-itselfness of the object. Imagine the sticker as an image of an object pasted entirely over the object itself. It represents the subjective way one approaches the world, or more specifically, how a subject appropriates the visible world (as image). The object, therefore, might look similar to two different people, but their associations with the object might differ vastly. I associate the image of the sticker with the paradox we are faced with in sensible reality, which I understand as simultaneously seeing and not seeing the object. Moreover, something understood as being the same but different. The sticker is always present, or at least in self-reflexive consciousness. It is literally, as it appears to the eye, the barrier between the mind and the world-as-object. I make reference to Jeff Koons' 'Balloon Flower (Magenta)' (2008) (fig.17) as an analogy to postmodern surface/image culture, wherein I suggest there exist sticker only, and wherein *dasein* is disregarded. In other words, sensible reality viewed as inflated (sticker).

With regards to the bigger scope of my argument, this chapter traces simulacrum back to the advent of cinema, as this marks the beginning of the durational copy, in other words, of the image in motion. The idea of simulacrum is critically reconsidered in the light of contemporary representational technology like film or the 3D cinema, for currently the boundaries between the sensible world and actual representations of this world are diminishing.

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According to Armitage (2000:6), Virilio's dromological society is built on the principle of "perpetually increasing speed" on many different levels of society or culture. He states that for Virilio, "the relentless logic of speed plays a crucial part in the militarization of urban space, the organization of territory and the transformation of social, political and cultural life", and that "[d]romology is an

essential component of urban space, the politics of transportation and information transmission, and the aesthetics of technologically generated perception" (Armitage 2000:6). Virilio's dromology thus concerns the technological advancements, mostly with military origins, which literally speed up the experience of the world. The connection between the train and cinema, which is explicated in this chapter, thus represents the ways in which a subject's experience of the world is literally sped up, and also how the distance between subject and world is perpetually diminished. Virilio (cited in Kellner 2000:109) explains that "the intensity of automatic weaponry and the new capacities of photographic equipment combine to project a final image of the world, a world in the throes of dematerialization and eventual disintegration".

It is evident that Virilio (1994) is very interested in the *displacement* of human perception by means of modern technology. In *The Vision Machine* (1994:63), he distinguishes between painting, photography and film and also video recording, holography and CGI as markers in the development of a logic of the image. He defines painting as the image's formal logic, meaning that painting (as a supplementary *and* mimetic reality) explores the formal qualities of the phenomenal world by copying and abstracting these forms. Photography and film signifies what he calls a dialectical logic, the next development of the image and its logic. If a mirror image is dialectical, it means that a 'thinking consciousness' places the mirror image or representation next to that which is being reflected in order to resolve the incongruence between the two 'worlds' or states. With video recording, CGI and holography, the reflection is so detailed and realistic, that it is allowed to become fully integrated with reality, causing a paradoxical logic. This paradoxical logic marks contemporary digital culture, and the point where "the real-time image dominates the thing represented, real time subsequently prevailing over real space, virtuality dominating actuality and turning the very concept of reality on its head" (Virilio 1994:63).

In terms of Virilio's logic of the image, cinema and photography is the progression of a formal logic to dialectical. In other words, this is the point where the image becomes a metaphorical or abstract reflection of reality because it is already a literal reflection. If, as Cascardi (1992:125) claims, Heidegger argued that modernity is the process of converting the world into image, motion picture brings into perspective one of the central objectives of the project of modernity: To convert the phenomenal world into image, and to duplicate this world as a parallel, supplementary reality. Compared to the telephone, automobile and all the other inventions associated with the rise of modernity, Charney (1995:1) holds that none of these "has both epitomized and transcended the period of its initial emergence more successfully than the cinema". He states that "[t]he culture of modernity rendered inevitable something like cinema, since cinema's characteristics evolved from

the traits that defined modern life in general". Virilio (1994:63) notes that the "frame of the nineteenth century" is the dialectic logic of the image. And indeed, the desire to copy the world as accurately as possible has come a long way since even before the Renaissance. At the end of the century, cinema marks the pinnacle of this interaction between reality and its reproduction. The 19th century thus saw the birth of the copy.

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According to Gunning (1995:16), travel actualities and trick films were especially popular among the early genres of cinema. He explains that many of the actuality films not only presented views of foreign places, but also offered "a simulacrum of travel […] through 'phantom ride' films, which were shot from the front of trains or prows of boats".[44] Besides the obvious connection to what he calls the "drama of modernity"; "a collapsing of previous experiences of space and time through speed", these phantom rides summon a particular first-person perspective. The lack of narrative in these films makes explicit the thrill experienced by a viewer when directly transferring his/her own vision onto the camera, a "highly complex exploration of the gaze outside dramatic structures" (Gunning cited in Strauven 2006:246). So even though the cinematic medium has become massively complex in all respects, the excitement initially felt by audiences is this basic displacement of vision, and very much still does in contemporary film. The phantom ride camera view has since become a standard cinematic device, perhaps most prominently implemented by director David Lynch (1997) in *Lost Highway*. As evident in the still from the film (fig.13), Lynch emphasizes the lack of narrative in this type of cinematic device. Not that of the subject venturing out into the world, but rather a subject lost and confused in 'a world', travelling on an unknown and dark 'highway'. Lynch's travel actuality is of one in the mind, abstract and disembodied. Within the parallel-narrative of the film,[45] the 'lost highway' is the flight from the one reality to the other, or rather, from the physical to the mental.

The claim that naturalism in representation endorses a radically objective world view, "[a] thinking which looks on from above, and thinks of the object-in-general" (Berman cited in Langer 1989:xi)[46] is even more applicable to motion picture. In the dark movie theatre, the viewer's attention is

[44] The most famous of these early phantom ride films is Biograph's (1897) The Haverstraw Tunnel (fig.12) which shows a train's journey through a tunnel (Balio 1985:73). The screen goes dark as the train enters the tunnel, generating anticipation for when the train will reach the faint light in the distance at the exit of the tunnel, which caused a sensation among movie goers (Balio 1985:73).

[45] The narrative in David Lynch's (1997) Lost Highway (fig.13) is parallel or doubled, as the film is divided into two different narratives wherein the actors assume different characters respectively. The connection between the two realities is never fully clarified to the viewer, although it appears that the second part plays off in the central character's mind as he stands on death-row for killing his wife. However, Lynch makes sure no single explanation of the narrative will hold up, as is the case with many of his films, e.g. Mulholland Drive *(2001)* and Inland Empire *(2006).*

[46] Keyhole Inc., which is now owned by Google, created the virtual globe program Google Earth (Wikipedia The Free Encyclopedia 2011. S.v. 'google earth'. 2011), a good example of what is meant by approaching something 'from above'.

consistently held as the individual frames are flashed in succession. So whereas a naturalistic painting would displace the viewer's vision only briefly and at random, the moving image absorbs the viewer's vision continuously. In this regard, motion picture has some virtual qualities in comparison to a naturalistic painting or photograph. Realistic still images operate differently, more subtly, but by no means inadequately.

Rabinovitz (2004:100) highlights the dominant model of movie spectatorship accepted by most theorists:

> [A] belief in a single, unitary viewing position – centred, distant, objectifying – that makes the spectator an effect of a linear technological evolution from the camera obscura to photography to cinema. Involvement in the cinema has always meant the fantasy of a despatialized, dematerialized self.

Rabinovitz (2004:102) counters the typical model described in the above with reference to "body-orientated genres" like pornography, action adventure, horror, and melodrama, claiming that these cinematic forms "carefully coordinate the spectator's physical and cognitive sensations". However, I'm not so sure that the occasional jerk or grasp can really qualify as a truly embodied cinematic experience. After all, bodily reactions would be first and foremost the result of the radical displacement of the viewer's vision and can therefore only be considered as side-effects of this displacement. Let's assume, then, such simulations produce a certain degree of disembodied subjectivity, that the silver screen intensifies a dualistic state of consciousness. Let's assume that cinema produces a modern subject that is essentially a viewer or spectator to a 'distant' visual narrative.

As exemplified by Biograph's *The Haverstraw Tunnel* (1897) (fig.14), the concept of the cinematic experience is often considered an after effect of the train ride experience. In context of the Lumiére films, Blümlinger (2006:245) states that "[t]he history of cinema began with a train". So if the train "embodies the complex realignment of practices which modern circulation entails" (Gunning 1995:15), cinema commodifies this new mode of seeing in the same way that a photograph incarnates a radically objectifying world-view. From the train window, the landscape loses its concreteness or materiality, thus it is no more an environment to be interacted with, but mere scenery to be viewed as one would scan through a paper flip book. Blümlinger (2006:246) furthermore explains that cinema, like the train, "functions both as a machine to organize the gaze and as a generator of linearity and movement". The transformation of experience brought about by the railroad thus marks a radical separation between the mind and the landscape. On the history of

photography, Crary (cited in Gunning 1995:17) notes that one should consider its role in "the reshaping of an entire territory on which signs and images, each effectively severed from a referent, circulate and proliferate". This degradation of the landscape to a collage of signs is embedded in the train ride experience and is captured so precisely by motion picture.

It is no surprise, then, that the image of the train window and the train itself has been used in countless films, from Alfred Hitchcock's Strangers on a Train (1951) (fig.15) to Christopher Nolan's *Inception* (2010) (fig.16), and would automatically read as a subtext of the connection between the history of cinema and the train. With *Inception*, the characters shift in and out of different dream spaces, and although there is an allocated 'real' reality to which they always return, thís reality is given as much screen time as the other realities to the effect that all the spaces seem equally legitimate. Although the viewer is always aware which reality is the 'real' one, this doesn't seem to be particularly important. The different realities or scenes exist like the different levels of a lucid dream and suppose a completely despatialized, overarching reality. Like the characters, the viewer simply finds him/herself in the next reality.

Similarly, with reference to the camera views in the boat scene from Alfred Hitchcock's The Birds (1963), Walton (1997:63) argues that "[e]ven if the spectator does imagine being on shore at one moment and on board the boat a moment later, this does not require imagining moving or being transported from the shore to the boat, imagining changing locations. One need not, in one's imaginative experience, follow out the implications of what one imagines". This instant teleportation of vision, as one experience when watching a visual narrative, is how the characters travel in-between the different realities in *Inception*.[47]

After the elaborate opening sequence of the film, the characters awaken in a high-speed train cabin wherein they intercepted the sleeping victim's mind. The train cabin, on the one hand, stands as a marker for the 'real' reality, and on the other, for the 'flight' from reality into other dream spaces. It symbolizes the modifications brought onto subjective experience of reality by modern transportation. The link between modern transport and the dream space is also further supported as the next victim is invaded on an airplane. In fact, most cases wherein the characters enter dream spaces, some form of transportation or movement is involved, some form of speed. Regarding digital information and transmission, as well as the advancement of fast transportation, Virilio (cited in Armitage 2000:110) interprets this way of interacting with one another, as well as the new spatiality

[47] The structure of reality in *Inception* (2010) draws from Celia Green's dream-theory, which, according to Oldis (2006:8) distinguishes between four natural processes by which lucid dreams can happen: Either by emotional stress within the dream, identifying some incongruity within the dream narrative, the occurrence of analytical thought within the dream, or as noticing the dream-like quality of the experience.

produced by this development, as the "birth", or "discovery", of a new dimension; a dimension with its "own temporality, spatiality and modes of being"[48] (Armitage 2000:110).

Inception thus gives the viewer an experience of this 'new' type of subjectivity brought about by modern modes of transportation and the type of visual experience offered by these modes. Nolan does this by making use of images of speed and transportation throughout the film, but also because his visual and narrative techniques assume a viewer that is able to make sense of a wholly fragmented visual story, skipping in and out of the scenes in the same way as the characters do in-between the dream spaces. Arresting camera work and rapid transition between scenes, which is rooted in the train ride experience, has become second-nature to the modern spectator. It has become the typical structure of visual narratives and is seamlessly integrated into film.

According to Beaumont and Freeman (2007:22), the early railway passengers look at a 'primitive' movie form out the train window, an actual motion picture without a plot or structured narrative. The effect of this visual experience is a sort of "optical recreation […] that had profound physiological and cultural impacts over the course of the nineteenth century" (Beaumont & Freeman 2007:22). As opposed to a typical modern film, wherein the structural characteristics is overshadowed by a meaningful narrative, this early train ride experience makes explicit the transformation of the world into an unstable and fleeting system of signs and images, as Crary (cited in Gunning 2001:17) notes. This optical transformation of the world, thus, not only concerns the liquidation of the previously accepted model of space and time, but also the connection between the subject and the external world-as-object.

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From a phenomenological point of view, the world is considered a mirage of intentional objects. By this I mean we reach out to the world of objects with our senses, with intention, although this is not a deliberate, but rather a spontaneous and immediate kind of intention (Wagner 1983:56). Wagner (1983:57) provides a definition of this fundamental phenomenological concept:

> Intentionality is a bipolar concept. It presupposes the intentional subject, the person who intends, and the intentional object, the object he or she intends. That means, on the one hand, that there is no recognition of objects without the subject who intends them; and, on

[48] Although the apocalyptic inclination in critical theory doesn't fit into my argument, there might be some truth in Virilio forewarning about this new dimension. He predicts that "this journey will take us out of our bodies, minds, nature and world as we have experienced and known them into a terrifying new sphere that will cause disastrous, possibly fatal, mutations of the mind, body and experience" (Armitage 2000:110).

> the other hand, that there is no consciousness, as inhering in a subject, without the intentional objects that are its contents.

This 'bipolarity' can be regarded as a relatively stable interaction between subject and 'world' that is necessary to maintain both spheres in their own right, to ensure that the subject doesn't fall into a purely abstract consciousness, and similarly, to prevent the total disappearance of self-consciousness. Hypothetically, the subject is always obligated to return from a dream space, or another metaphysical ambit. By extension, it could be said that the material world is subjected to possible alterations that a thinking consciousness might bring about. In its *physical* interaction with the world, perhaps most prominently marked by the experience of bodily pain, the body is the invariable tie between the mind and the external world. The notion that the world is in fact 'external' has been challenged by many thinkers.[49] But this notion is of course a crucial factor in maintaining the separation between a thinking consciousness and world.

The necessity to physically interact with the world with one's other senses, vision being the exception here, is key to understand the deep-rooted modifications in experience instigated by the train ride. Because, from the train window, the world outside the carriage loses all material qualities, except for the actual photons reaching the eye retina. Because one cannot 'physically' interact with the scenery from out the window, the 'outside' world is reduced to almost only appearance. It is rendered a visual sequence which is literally sped up or slowed down at 'your' wish, a wish granted by modern transport. In short, the 'world' revolves around 'you' as an autonomous subject. 'Your' being is that of consciousness directed towards the world (Sartre 2001:107).

But one must ask, in awe of what the dromological society has achieved, how this 'outside' world has countered such an aggressive perversion of its spatiality. One must consider how a world external to the mind 'protects' itself from the physical operation of the mind.

Of course it is impossible to know what Kant called the "thing-in-itself" (in Russell 1936:84). Russell (1936:84) describes it as the physical object which we cannot experience, the experience outside 'our' experience of its physical and perceivable qualities. He stresses that knowledge, therefore, can only ever apply to subjective experience and never beyond that. Outside this experience, the very idea of 'object' does not necessarily exist at all. Or as a fundamental ontological approach would rather say, "being-in-itself"; "the manner in which the world external to one's own exists" (Sartre

[49] Scharfstein (1998:407) names Asanga, Vasubandhu and Berkeley as theorists who "internalize or dematerialize the world". According to Scharfstein (1998:407) there is a hefty price to pay, both philosophically and socially, when such idealism is to be accepted. Socially, one discredits many Western philosophers. Philosophically, it is nearly impossible to explain "why the illusion of externality is universal and almost universally persuasive" (Scharfstein 1998:407). On this price, Scharfstein (1998:407) also asks why nature should be so perverse.

2001:107). This is why, Russell (1036:19) argues, "[w]e must […], if possible, find, in our own purely private experiences, characteristics which show, or tend to show, that there are in the world things other than ourselves and our private experiences". Priest (in Sartre 2001:107-8) describes Sartre's being-in-itself as "objective, inert […] undifferentiated, solid and opaque to itself and filled with itself".

This 'externality', possibly correctly defined as being-in-itself, thus doesn't have to 'protect' itself from the mind as it is automatically preserved by the very operation of the mind. Sartre (2001:108) states that "the primary characteristic of the being of an existent is never to reveal itself completely to consciousness". Cartesian doubt is the key here, for the fact that one doubt the existence of the external world means that one is already dissociated from this world.

The *World English Dictionary* (Dictionary.com 2011. S.v. 'deter') explains 'deterrence' as "discouraging (from acting) or prevent (from occurring), usually by instilling fear, *doubt*, or anxiety" (my emphasis). From Latin 'deterrere', it literally means 'away' (*de*-) and 'frighten' (*terrere*). So insofar as an intentional object would, hypothetically speaking, attract a thinking subject, a deterring object would ward-off by means of installing fear, anxiety or doubt. It is imperative to note that intentionality does not validate the existence of an object beyond our sensory perception of it; after all, intentionality is very much concerned with the phenomenal, with representations in the mind or the ability of the mind to refer to an existent or non-existent object.

De Muralt (1974:4) explains Husserl's object:

> The object is not the existing object of common sense […] Hence it cannot be the object in its material externality, the object whose existence common sense directly affirms […]. The correlation between consciousness and object is therefore more precisely a correlation between consciousness and objective sense, and transcendental constitution as a sense-giving.

De Muralt (1974:5) furthermore explains that phenomenology is not a realistic and direct description of the real world, but rather a kind of logic, "a science of meanings", which "formulates the structure of the constitution of the world's sense for us". Phenomenology is thus concerned with the reflective process and not with the "immediate 'naïve' contact with the world [which] seems to be lost – or at least to become less and less immediate" (De Muralt 1974:5). So the reflexive process, of a thinking consciousness, is essentially what turns something into an intentional object. Imagine the intentional object as a sticker, an image of the 'real' 'thing' on it, pasted completely and perfectly over the 'real' object, hiding the being-in-itself. Reflexive consciousness cannot comprehend what is

behind the sticker, but is none the less aware that there is something there. The sticker can either be two- or three-dimensional, and it operates as an image-object. Also the notion of 'peeling off' and re-pasting elsewhere follow this two- to three-dimensional movement. I use the analogy of the sticker to stress the visual operation of intentionality, of how one's interaction with the world is primarily through surface, and the different forms adopted by this 'surface' in a multi-dimensional space. In very much the same way Jeff Koons's 'Balloon flower (Magenta)' (2008) (fig.17) is iconic of a postmodern era of over-inflation,[50] the image of the sticker is meant to illustrate that this 'inflated space' is not necessarily empty just because 'we' decided it to be so. One's interaction with the-object-in-general in a digital Western culture is much stickier than what the balloon parable suggests, and definitely not empty.

On the topic of modern thought, Sartre (2000:xxi) argues that existence has been reduced to "the series of appearances which manifest it". The reason he gives is for this operation is profound, and the most lucid position on this question that I have encountered. Sartre (2000:xxi) says "[i]ts aim was to overcome a certain number of dualisms which have embarrassed philosophy and to replace them by the monism of the phenomenon". He speaks of a world flattened into image, where there can be no difference between interior and exterior, a space wherein the phenomenon can be regarded as "absolutely indicative of itself" (Sartre 2000:xxi). The phenomenon, therefore, as its own perfect appearance through and through.

But because one cannot know what is behind the sticker, an anxiety arises in the mind, which causes the subject to fear the 'real'. This fear is possibly one of the primary motives for the mind's impulse to simulate the 'real' thing; or rather, to simulate the sticker. I say that we only simulate the sticker because the sticker is already a simulation in the mind. Baudrillard (1996:5) writes the following on the problem with reality: "this is what we do with the problem of truth or reality of this world: we have resolved it by technical simulation".[51] To simulate something is not necessarily to integrate it into reality. Only when it is fully integrated can it be considered a simulacrum. Cinema only simulates 'a reality' as far as its material qualities are concerned.

Take the natural landscape as example. With the early train ride experience, as I have noted earlier, this environment detaches from the human body, except in the light of vision. This view of the world thus very much produces the separation between what Cartesian dichotomy respectively describes

[50] On the notion of media-inflation, Baudrillard (cited in Stevenson 2004:166) states the following: "They have broken down reality into simple elements that they have reassembled into scenarios of regulated oppositions, exactly in the same way that the photographer imposes his contrasts, lights, angles on his subject". On a visual level, inflation thus concerns the visual manipulation of a given world as well as the way it is cut up and reassembled to form a narrative of this world. This is the essence of postmodern inflation.

[51] Note the difference between simulation and simulacrum as explicated in the introductory chapter.

as nature (*res extensa*) and mind (res *cogitans*) (Mulhall 2005:6-7). One cannot deny that, on a day to day basis, one continually thinks in terms of generalized dualisms.[52] In a similar way to the train view, motion picture amputates a particular worldview in its entirety, as a complete scene, to the effect that a pertinent dichotomy between subject and represented-world is set up. Cinema imposes a world view insofar as it simulates a reality as a whole, as a parallel world. It pulls the sticker off in its entirety. It is the manifestation of the intentional world-as-object, the literal effect of an abstract mind on the world.

Cinematic visual narrative, as the fragmentary displacement of the viewer's perspective, is truly what offers a different way of looking at the world, and at oneself. In simple terms, an image in motion would have the same basic effect on a viewer as a still image, but only 'more real' and arresting. Any sort of identification, projection or transference between a subject and an image would now be in-motion, detailed and realistically animated. Cinema bridges the gap previously existing between mind and image/surface, it just 'clicks in' and sync-up very efficiently. It is very much a reflection of appearance as well as *motion*. At this point, there are two operations at work, which might turn out to be one and the same. The first one is that the subject might become even more distanced from the world by overexposure to a represented and simulated reality. Alternatively the distance between mind and world will diminish. I think both are partially correct. As for the first one, I considered how visual representations set off a more objectifying way of looking at the world. But on the other hand, this new way of interacting with 'a world' happens in a singular space, which suggests that our path to re-embodiment might be running the long *and* perhaps the wrong way around. That is, from a substance-monistic to a substance-dualistic view, and then back to a substance-monistic view.

According to Jameson (1997:148) "the shift in the dynamics of cultural pathology can be characterized as one in which the alienation of the subject is displaced by the latter's fragmentation". But is the way out of the postmodern dilemma of inclusivity and diversity simply to give in to fragmentation and schizophrenia? It doesn't really seem plausible that a modern subject, who still very much understands the world through rational scrutiny, will simply accept a wholly fragmented form of reality. Virilio's *paradoxical logic* is after all a rational understanding of something which is seemingly contradictory, as well as the way the mind bends around a new experience of the world. A world that this very mind has undoubtedly constructed.

[52] In the philosophy of mind, dualism most importantly concerns the relationship between either mind and matter or mind and body, the latter meaning that the mental and the physical are of the same category, and the former suggesting they are, in some respects, non-physical (Hart 1996:265-7).

Chapter Three

Integration: Literal, Mental and Digital Self-Reflexivity

We can escape the commonplace only by manipulating it, controlling it, thrusting it into our dreams or surrendering it to the free play of our subjectivity (Vaneigem cited in Taylor 2010:185).

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In this chapter I approach the notion of subjectivity from a psychoanalytical perspective, specifically with regards to the idea of the subject's sense of 'I', and how the reception and interpretation of images by this 'I' sustains self-reflexive consciousness. Insofar as the idea of a simulacrum concerns the differentiation between 'real' and 'fake', I locate simulacrum at the point wherein an external image is internalized into an individual's private mental space. In other words, wherein the external image is seamlessly integrated into self-reflexive consciousness, and literally becomes part of this particular subject's identity. With emphasis on Lacan's mirror stage model of the 'I', I make reference to a selection of images from fine art and pop culture wherein the role of the external image in subjectivity is illustrated.

I will demonstrate how the notion of a postmodern subjectivity can be understood as a breakdown of the Cartesian cogito, which is dualistic, into what Baudrillard defines as a hyperreality, considered by Natoli and Hutcheon (1993:306) to be a monist type reality. I argue that contemporary image culture, with the central focus on image transmission, penetrates the individual subject's private mental space, to the effect that the postmodern subject can be viewed as open to the 'external' world, and also inverted, doubled and fully integrated. The external image fills the subject in entirety.

In Bartolomé Esteban Murillo's 'Self Portrait' (1670-3) (fig.18) we encounter a similar self-reflexive trait as found in Bridget Baker's 'The Blue Collar Girl' (2004) (fig.19). Both images illustrate the presence of the specular body-image as it pertains to self-reflexivity, and is therefore discussed in terms of the psychoanalytic 'I'. By extension, I turn the focus to Cindy Sherman's 'Untitled Film Stills' (1977-1982) (fig.20) as a popular reference to what a postmodern identity entails.

I refer back to anatomy drawings from early modern time as an analogy to what I understand as postmodern image culture. The scientific peeling away at reality, as we have done with the body and the physical world, is what is seen in the drawings of William Hunter's 'Untitled' (fig.21). Such a reductionist way of approaching the world, I contend, slices and divides the world into image-

surface. As Sartre states, "once you've peeled off all the layers, there is nothing left, no 'being-behind-the-appearance' for 'the being of the existent is exactly what it appears'" (Sartre 2000:xxii). This body, or image of the body, is what was exhibited in Gunther von Hagens' 'Body Worlds' (1995) (fig.22).

What really faces 'us' is a collapse of the dualist view, which is significantly verified by modern science and also vividly visualized in the entertainment sphere. A monistic view explains the paradoxes which result from a dualist approach, and notions like a collapse of interiority and exteriority, or between reality and imagination, can be sufficiently explained according to this view. Fragmentation is thus rather an incorrect description of a collapse in between dualist notions concerning ontology, materiality and subjectivity.

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The excess of images in contemporary visual culture could be accounted for by two key features concerning an archetypal model of subjectivity in a Western context as associated with modernity as a meta-ideology.[53] Firstly, that this subject typically requires an interaction with images on a day to day basis, and secondly, that this desire has increased significantly since even before the Renaissance. The *cogito* (ego), as a consciousness which favours an objectifying rationalist worldview, inevitably also objectifies the body, or rather, the external appearance of the body, which is why this notion of subjectivity is described as being disembodied and self-transparent (Trifonova 2007:13). The 'thinking-subject' is aligned with an external mirror image exactly because the thinker must necessarily form an abstract and enclosed image of the self in order to think about the self (self-reflexivity). The spectral self, as introjected mirror image, can be thought of as a three-dimensional or holographic body-image of what is observed in the mirror or otherwise.

Mirrors date back to 6 000BC, but it was only in the Renaissance that European manufacturers managed to produce an almost seamless reflection (Hadsund 1993:3-4). Without a doubt, this experience must have been 'magical', to see the world so clearly reflected for the first time. It is also no surprise that self-reflexivity is a crucial part of the enlightened Cartesian subject. Elkins (2008:400) explains that "[a]t that time the mirror was all but a simple artefact […] For one thing, mirrors were seen as stimulating self-reflection and passing on self-knowledge; they could represent wisdom and rational thinking […] The image of the mirror as eye was also very popular". The

[53] Abravanel (cited in Hartley 2002:71) explains meta-ideology as "[a]bstract social and analytical philosophic belief systems [that] … include 'ultimate considerations' and abstract notions like the greater good associated with justice, freedom, and progress". More applicable to my argument, however, is that he also states that it is a "doctrine without a distinct action component" (Abravanel cited in Hartley 2002:71), whereto Hartley adds that it is "the lofty expression of disembodied ideals" (Hartley 2002:71).

problem with talking about reflexivity in present-day culture is that it can either refer to literal reflection, like a mirror, and more abstract reflection, which is mental. That this confusion is possible at all, points to the fact that reality, in its entirety, is reflective, and also, already reflected. Like the trompe l'oeil impulse, the problem with literal reflection, like in a mirror, is that a doubt rises in the mind, a doubt that the reality in the mirror might be the real one. Or that one's senses might be lying and that it's all in the mind.[54]

Aers (1992:190) contends that the notion of the unified self or subject, which acknowledges a division between the individual and society or private and public is, "entirely and exclusively the product of the 'liberal humanist' ideology that emerged in the seventeenth century and has reigned ever since in the West".[55] It is no surprise that the development of the genre of portraiture, and self-portraiture, correlates with the rise of liberal humanism in the West. Early modern portraiture makes visible the precedency ascribed to the self, "as the mainspring and origin of consciousness, understanding, meaning, knowledge and agency" (Munslow 2000:164).

In the same way naturalistic representation supports an abstracted and objectifying, distanced view of the world, so do Baroque self-portraits embody the particular subject consciousness which experiences this objectified world. It is specifically the naturalistic style of the Baroque painters which sets portraits from this period apart from others.

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The link between the mirror image and naturalism is explicit in Bartolomé Esteban Murillo's 'Self Portrait' (1670-3) (fig.18). Three strategic components seen in this work are relevant to my inquiry, namely the image of the picture-within-picture, the oval frame and the artist's hand protruding from the oval frame in a trompe l'oeil fashion. Together, these elements articulate characteristics of subjectivity as constructed through naturalistic representation and the mirror image. In the painting we see Murillo as a portrait within a painting, his hand reaching past the golden portrait frame into the space of the painting. The oval portrait also reminds of an actual mirror, reflecting back the artist himself. Typical self-portraiture is of course, by nature, a self-reflexive operation on the part of the artist, even if only in terms of rendering his/her external appearance by using a mirror. So already, Murillo speaks within the imaginary realm of subject formation and mirror reflections.

[54] Such a view of reality aligns with philosophical idealism, phenomenalism (not to be confused with phenomenology) or mentalistic monism (Grayling 2010:241).

[55] On a broad and conceptual level of human interaction with the world, humanism, as Cornish (2005:28) writes, "honours mankind as God and praises ourselves above all else". He furthermore explains that it is "a form of theism that elevates us and our achievements to the supreme position in the universe" and that most humanists believe that the "universe is self-existing and self-sustaining".

However, by including within its borders the actual 'frame of consciousness', signified by the oval frame, this rendering is a more nuanced articulation of an early modern self-reflexivity regarding the specular body-image of the subject. Minissale (2009:10) regards the type of consciousness activated by an inspection of the picture-in-picture as self-analytical: "It takes the picture and its complex use of 'folded' space as a mirror to reflect back or characterize conscious experience as a series of framed thoughts". Murillo makes explicit how he 'frames' himself in the act of rendering a self-portrait, this double self-reflexivity setting off "visions of halls of mirrors" to the inquisitive viewer (Minissale 1009:10, my emphasis). What Minissale means by "vision of halls of mirrors" is that the viewer not only sees the "visual organization of the artist's thought", but also "provides viewers with the opportunity to schematize their own thoughts patterns and their own methods of visual inspection" (Minissale 2009:13). The fact that the frame becomes visible at all in Murillo's self-portrait concerns the exemplification of the demarcations between subject and reflection as well as viewer and image.

As a conspicuous marker for the disintegration between these different spheres, as demarcated by the frame, we see Murillo's hand protruding from the oval frame in typical trompe l'oeil fashion. After all, as Murillo seems to suggest, there really is no division between the realms, except when it is indicated as such, which could probably be considered a viable division. Minissale (2009:20-21) contends that "[c]consciousness can be everywhere at the same time as directed at one focal point", and that "the frame becomes a symbol of a consciousness that must be suppressed in order for another to emerge, a consciousness of the second, fictive frame inside the painting". Murillo makes explicit the 'framing' implemented in order to contain art, or subjectivity. More specifically, the frame-within-a-frame is an operation of self-reflexivity insofar as it suppresses the lack of difference between two allocated and very much imaginary, spaces. Murillo shows the indifference between what is 'inside' the frame and that which is 'outside' the frame. He also exposes the invisibility of the frame in classical painting which keeps the artwork "naturally self-contained" (Lebensztejn cited in Minissale 2009:20). Moreover, he reveals an equivalence between subject and body-image, how the one informs the other, how the image comes 'alive' as an idea and construction of subjectivity-as-frame. Murillo's subjectivity in this instance does not concern a collapse between different spheres of reality which causes a fragmentary and destabilized self. Rather, he suggests an almost seamless transgression through the frames, which renders the subject or body-image a simulation within the other sphere. That is to say, Murillo's self-portrait protrudes from a reflective reality, as contained by the oval frame, into the 'ordinary' reality, as indicated by the desk and paint brushes. The artist's hand, as the locus of artistic reproduction, stands as the threshold between material reality as a given, and a supplementary reflective reality.

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From a psychoanalytic perspective, Murillo's self-portrait visualizes the ego or sense of self, as the regulation in consciousness between internal and external, or self and other. [56] Freud (cited in Ross 2004:66) famously stated that "[t]he ego is first and foremost a bodily ego; it is not merely a surface entity, but is itself the projection of a surface", which Ross interprets as "an image of a surface, an image perhaps of an image". On the relationship between the subject and its mirror image, Lacan (2001:2) suggests "we have only to understand the mirror stage as identification, in the full sense that analysis gives to the term: namely, the transformation that takes place in the subject when he assumes an image". Bowie (1993:92)[57] understands Lacan's Imaginary as the reiteration throughout one's life of the "original identificatory procedures" which brought about the 'I' in the first place. In this sense, then, the transformative element of the subject's relationship with its mirror image remains a constant throughout one's life. The phantom consciousness is predestined to continually assume the external image. Whether this image is of the subject him/herself or of another person entirely is less relevant than this yearning within the subject to assume the body-image in general.

In a still from Bridget Baker's 'The Blue Collar Girl' (2004) (fig.19), which forms part of her 'chroma-key' character series, the mirror reflection as locus of identity is clearly visualized. Baker also implements the gold frame oval mirror in the image to portray the imaginary bond between subject and mirror image, which coincidently links it with Murillo's self-portrait. Although this specific image of the blue collar girl is not a self-portrait, like the pictures taken in Ghent and Valais (Malcomess 2009:22), Baker implements an ideological structure of subjectivity most obviously linked to the writings of Freud and Lacan as discussed in the above paragraphs. In Baker, the relationship between the image and the mirror, significantly placed alongside each other on the wall, is exemplified; the body reflected back as image with which the subject identifies, as she would with the portrait on the wall. Malcomess (2009:24) recognizes the portrait as an *ideé fixee*, a recurring motif reminding the viewer of the performative nature of a persona. She furthermore states that it is their "encoded […]

[56] Bronson (2000:12) explains that Freudian psychoanalysis focuses on emotional development, wherein the ego is the "mental mechanism that is responsible for consciousness and adaptive control of behaviour". Thus the ego "serves the 'id'" insofar as it gratifies one's "basic drives and energy for action" within the "moral demands of society, internalized as the 'superego'" (Bronson 2000:12). Washburn's (1995:4) understanding of the ego, which is fundamentally similar to the views of Jung, Grof and Levin, "postulates the existence of an original dynamic, creative, spontaneous source out of which the ego emerges, from which the ego then becomes estranged, to which, during the stages of transcendence, the ego returns, and with which, ultimately, the ego is integrated".

[57] According to Bowie (1993:92), Lacan's Imaginary refers to the desire in the individual "not simply to placate the Other but to dissolve his otherness by becoming his counterpart". So as the little other remains "inscribed in the imaginary order" (Evans 1996:133). Bowie (1993:92) explains that Lacan's Imaginary, Symbolic and Real should be considered as "orders each of which serves to position the individual within a force-field that traverses him". The imaginary is thus the reiteration through one's life of the "original identificatory procedures" (Bowie 1993:92) which brought about the ego, and thus involves one's relation to the external world insofar as one relates with the external mirror image of oneself. It is "the order of mirror images, identifications and reciprocities" (Bowie 1993:92).

self-awareness" which "places these works in a kind of lineage from Surrealism to postmodernism" (Malcomess 2009:24). However, as evident in Murillo's self-portrait, this self-reflexive trait goes back much further than Surrealism.

I noted earlier, self-reflexivity "is one of the dominant epistemological strategies developed by Enlightenment philosophy" (Henke 2005:13). What is most likely to mark a postmodern aspect of Baker's work is the variable identity of the blue collar girl. The actors playing the role of the blue collar girl is inconsistent, only Ghent and Valais being self-portraits of Baker herself. Baker's character suggests a vacuum at the centre by emphasizing the structure or model of self-reflexive consciousness; in other words, discarding the yolk and presenting the shell.

One cannot discuss Baker's 'The Blue Collar Girl' without referring to Cindy Sherman's 'Untitled Film Stills' (1977-1982) (fig.20), as Malcomess (2009:34) notes. Sherman famously illustrates assimilation by a subject of on-screen other. As seen in 'Untitled' (fig.20), the female movie characters Sherman channels are invented, although the "sixty-nine solitary heroines map a particular constellation of fictional femininity that took hold in post-war America - the period of Sherman's youth" (Galassi:n.pag.). That these icons of the silver screen are in fact fictional draw attention to Sherman's complete assimilation of these characters, for they do not exist except in Sherman's stills, even though they are essentially referenced. Probably having been exposed to the 'real' heroines throughout her youth, Sherman succeeded in fully assimilating these imaginary characters, transforming her appearance so as to be confused with them. I think Sherman is celebrated for recognizing and illustrating a certain aspect of subjectivity which concerns a subject's interaction with the image of the other. Sherman's film stills thus makes the link between the specular body-image (mirror stage) and the image of the other (in the media and symbolic sphere) as pertaining to the subject's construction of a body-image or identity. She assumes the image of the movie characters completely in the way the ego assimilates the specular body-image; only, the external image is not from the mirror but from the silver screen.

Homer (2005:70) explains that Lacan's 'little' other "refers to imaginary others", and that "we treat these others as whole, unified or coherent egos, and as reflections of ourselves they give us the sense of being complete whole beings". He also reminds that "this is the other of the mirror stage" (Homer 2005:70). Hence like the specular body-image, two-dimensional representations of another subject, as on the television or silver screen, can also be considered as little others insofar as such representations typically represent other subjects as unified and whole. Insofar as such representations function by appearance. In contemporary digital culture, the excessive occurrence

of often glorified and fictional characters on what can be described as a world-screen very much exemplifies the extent of this identification on a large scale.

Murillo's hand protruding past the golden oval frame thus signifies this collapse between the private mind and a type of externality, in this case a mirror which he used to paint himself. It could perhaps be as Crary (1992:38-39) defines it: "a certain metaphysic of interiority"; the way the screen can just automatically synchronise with one's mind. But when did this operation become automatic, when did we lose the free choice to simply switch it off? Quite a while ago, according to Murillo's portrait. The idea that reality and a reflective parallel reality are collapsible into each other is exactly what collapses the two ambits. Of course, Plato (1991:279) warned against this: aesthetic reflection will lead to 'us' "make the sun and the things in heaven; quickly the earth; quickly yourself […]". Television and digital media is the point where the reflective process becomes a creative one, and more importantly, a substitutive operation, where the world is made, so to speak. The digital screen is, in a way, descendant of the mirror (as object); a kind of advanced hybrid device between a mirror and a painting. Plato could just as well have been warning against computer generated imagery.

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The Renaissance marks a point in the history of modernity wherein self-reflexivity, on a mental and physical level, becomes prominent. Huber, Middeke and Zapf (2005:8) shed some light on the significance of meta-fiction and self-reflexivity since the Renaissance:

> [S]elf-reflexivity, in the sense of a metafictional awareness of its own constructedness and textuality, has for a long time been a major, even constitutive feature of the discourses of literature. This is evidenced by metafictional traits in works like Shakespeare's *Hamlet*, Cervantes's *Don Quixote*, Lawrence Stern's *Tristram Shandy*, the poetological writings of the Romantics, or the self-reflexive poetics of Modernism. Of course, the later twentieth Century has seen an unprecedented, even inflationary appearance of metafictional texts and genres, which have often been subsumed under the term postmodernism. In these metafictional artefacts the act of narration or, more generally, of signification, becomes its own subject matter.

According to Heaphy (2007:70), Giddens (1991) has "reintroduced the theme of agency in a particularly powerful way through theorizing the heightened reflexivity (or self-awareness) of the current period of modernity". It is not that self-reflection did not exist pre-Renaissance, but in the Renaissance a kind if awareness of being aware, a double reflexivity, became quite prominent in literature and creative art practices. The amalgamation between this self-reflexivity, together with

naturalism in painting, illusion in depth, and a very pertinent ideology of subjectivity, or self-consciousness, marks the true advent of modernity as a reflexive socio-cultural operation, of which today we see the consequences. Modernity is the transformation of the mirror, its slow process of being integrated and 'coming alive'.

Heaphy (2007:76) furthermore explains that "institutional reflexivity implies the monitored or self-conscious nature of modernity. On the one hand, this is partly the product of rational thought as promoted by the Enlightenment". He contends that "the reflexivity of modernity is partly the product of how rational thought turned on itself [undermining] the certainty of knowledge and truth" (Heaphy 2007:76). But on the subject of modern electronic and digital mass media, Heaphy (2007:77) notes that Giddens disagrees with Baudrillard, arguing against an "autonomous realm of hyperreality where the sign and the image is everything", even though he acknowledges that this media not only reflects reality, but very much contributes to it. Giddens (1991:27) also recognizes the flattening out of the psycho-social-pictorial[58] space: "The 'emptying' of time and space set in motion processes that established a single 'world' where none existed previously [...] late modernity produces a situation in which humankind in some respects become a 'we', facing problems and opportunities where there are no 'others'". The 'partitioning' between internal and external, self and other as well as here and there, is broken down. It is literally the compression of space-time, and the absorption of the distance between subject and world. Baudrillard (1994:121) speaks of this absorption of a "gap that leaves room for an ideal or critical projection". I think what he means can be understood in many ways, although. In this instance relevant to the distance between the consciousness (subject) and the thing which allows for reflexivity, like a mirror. He states that there is

> no longer any need for a critical consciousness to hold up the mirror of its double to the world: our modern world swallowed its double when it lost its shadow, and the irony of that incorporated double shines out at every moment in every fragment of our signs, of our objects, of our models (Baudrillard 1996:73).

Baudrillard means that self-reflexivity, as an awareness of both critical (mental) and physical (actual) self-reflection, is now fully integrated in Western society.

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[58] What I mean by this is the psychological interaction of the private individual with him/herself and with society in general through image or screen.

Postmodern culture is often referred to as a flattening out of reality into image, or in Frederic Jameson's (cited in Kellner 1995:236) words, "a new kind of flatness […] a new kind of superficiality in the most literal sense". In a similar vein, Denzin (1991:140) states: "At the level of surface, glossed, everyday experience, the real is the representation. A cinematic society, a society of the spectacle, a society which views itself reflected back to itself on the glare of the TV screen is only what is seen". In light of Jameson and Denzin's claims, I question what is exactly meant with the postmodern, fragmented subject in a literal or actual sense. By this I mean how it applies to the notion of subjectivity and its relationship with the material, representational image. To answer this question, I think one should look at the treatment of the body, or body-images, in contemporary image culture, assuming the physical (visual/material) handling of the body is indicative of a particular notion of subjectivity.

Since the Renaissance, the visual arts have played a crucial role in the imaging of the body. In contemporary Western culture, a scientific reductionist approach is more popular than ever. Together with representational technology, sensible reality and the body is understood through the image more than ever, as evident in BBC One documentary, The Human Body, (1998). The role played by art in the anatomical dissection of the human body, in its more 'functional' days, was of representing each part of the body in a naturalistic and scientifically accurate way, a relationship between science and art which bloomed in the Renaissance era (Earls 1987:14). What we see in the plethora of anatomical drawings from early modern scientific and medical practices (fig.21), is that each layer is intentionally peeled off, suggesting a 'multi-layered' interiority of the human 'body'. It is specifically the peeling away of the skin which draws my attention.

Against the background of the modern quest for knowledge, anatomical drawings of the human body, in a non-medical sense, illustrate the physical tearing away at material reality. I regard these representations of the internal body as analogous to scientific inquiry, or reductionist thinking. When we turn our attention to an example from Gunther von Hagen's controversial exhibition 'Body Worlds' (1995) (fig.22), we are confronted with an image of a real cadaver, extraneously dissected and spread open layer by layer. The exhibition showcases a large selection of preserved and partially dissected human corpses in various classical and more modern poses.

In light of these grotesque[59] bodies, what is the most obvious question the viewer is being confronted with here? Are not we stripping away at the body, and matter, to find the soul? My answer would be that the very fact these bodies are exhibited in a museum or gallery space means

[59]According to Engelke & Tomlinson (2007:203), "Bakhtin's grotesque body is opposed above all to the exquisitely contained, exquisitely self-contained classical body. The grotesque body is 'open to the outside world'… It copulates. It defecates. It eats. It drinks. It gives birth. It dies".

that the dissecting of the body is not only for medical purposes. The view we are given, is a scientific and reductionist one. At the same time, this exhibition also entertains a 'return to the body'; or stated differently, a return to the material. The focus is explicitly on the physicality of the human body.

With regards to the question of the existence of soul, MacDonald (2000:280) notes the following in Descartes:

> Before his meditations began, the author stated that he would offer a proof of the soul's immortal status; but by the end of the Sixth Meditation no such proof has been offered. Perhaps this is because in the course of the Second Meditation he had to abandon the very concept of soul and all its preconceived attributes in favour of its replacement, the mind, for which he cannot elicit the attribute of immortality.

Although Descartes is generally considered a notorious proclaimer of substance dualism, he seems to be quite favourable of substance monism according to his definition of 'substance' in Part One of *Principles of Philosophy.* Descartes (Kulstad 2003:66) states the following: "By substance we can understand nothing other than a thing which exists in such a way as to depend on no other thing for its existence […]. [t]here is only one substance… namely God". Modern neurobiology or neuroscience is a good example of where reductionist thought, which is absolutely rooted in a monistic view of reality, starts to explain the interaction between mental and physical processes. This scientific study, like many other sciences and streams of thought today, is fundamentally interdisciplinary, and collaborates with chemistry, computer science, engineering, mathematics, medicine, philosophy, physics and psychology (Bickle 2003:158). Bickle (2003:158) concludes that "[a] choice is beginning to loom for philosophers of mind: either state-of-the-art neuroscience, which is ruthlessly reductionist, or anti-reductionist armchair metaphysics. Middle ground is disappearing quickly with the advancement of cellular and molecular neuroscience". Science literally lays bare each 'layer' of physical reality, inwards and outwards. Like the cadavers in the 'Bodies: The Exhibition', the West understands reality in a reductionist way, even though some people might think they do not directly support such a view.

This operation of 'imaging' each layer into an interior space is what can be seen as a 'flattening' of each 'slice', a 'flattened out' reality or 'one world', only indicative of itself as appearance, and without a difference between an understanding of interior-exterior dualistic spatiality. The further one dissects, the more surface-layers are revealed. The further one slices, however, the more one

realizes that there is no interior body; it instantly becomes more surface and image, as postmodern notions of subjectivity entails.

On the topic of this disembodiment, Matthews (2006:74) writes the following:

> Objectivism about human behaviour is mistaken, because it separates external, physical movements from internal, private consciousness. But human behaviour […] is the product of the embodied subjectivity […]. If I asked someone to describe my present behaviour just as they see it, without reference to any scientific theories, they would undoubtedly say. 'You are sitting at your word processor, writing your book'. What they would not naturally say […] is, 'You are sitting in front of an illuminated screen, and your fingers are striking the keys on a keyboard in front of you'. Consciousness, or subjectivity, is not something behind the scenes, hidden from everyone's view, but is manifested in the movements of my fingers: Subjectivity is embodied.

Chapter Four

Simulacrum

The main objective to reality is its propensity to submit unconditionally to every hypothesis you can make about it […]. It submits to everything with unrelenting servility (Baudrillard 1996:3).

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In this chapter I indicate how subjectivity, or personal narrative, can be considered an operation of simulacrum. I look more closely into the role of metaphor we encounter in subjective experiences of the world as evidential of the simulational nature of subjectivity. Having said that, I understand simulacrum as the manner in which the subject, or the mind, hopelessly distorts sensible reality for the sake of personal narrative. The reception and response of images, and how they are altered and narrated by subjective experience in irrational yet meaningful ways, is the very core of the simulacrum. As I have stressed throughout the text, simulacrum is only possible in self-reflexive consciousness, and is therefore not applicable outside the Cartesian subject-object dualism. I conclude this chapter with a discussion of my own art practice, and how the theme of simulacrum pertains to my technical processes and general aesthetic.

I refer to René Magritte's use of the picture frame in 'The Human Condition' (1933) (fig.23) as metaphor for the simulacrum. Minnisale's idea of the 'framing of consciousness' is of particular relevance to how the simulacrum might be experienced by a person. The frame, as image and demarcation, is how I imagine the subject constructs a worldview, hence the emphasis on our approach to the world as a visual operation.

I will demonstrate with reference to the selection of images a kind of magical 'potentiality' which I associate with objects in the world or 'objecthood' in general. Hart's (2005:30) definition of the object in magical realist literature, in my view, can also be applied to the art object. With art object I refer to how the world-as-object is contemplated through the visual representation of objects in art. It is within this context that I discuss the treatment of objects in Marcel Duchamp's 'Bottle Rack' (1914) (fig.26), Adriaan van Zyl's 'Hospital Still Life II' (2004) (fig.25), as well as in my own works 'Laundry Bin' (2009) (fig.27) and 'Telephone' (2011) (fig30.). In these examples particularly, the objects seem to have a life of their own, either visually or conceptually.

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The type of monism Baudrillard postulates with his simulacrum theory is not one to bring much needed change to rigid dualist views on reality. Baudrillard (cited in Smith 2001:2) insists that "in the dialectical relationship between reality and images […], the image has taken over and imposed its own ephemeral logic; an immoral logic without depth, good and evil, beyond trust and falsity". His monism is not the revival of a tangible connection between mind and matter, but rather a 'solidifying' of the mind's manipulation of reality. Baudrillard's monism is a mentalistic[60] one. According to Natoli and Hutcheon (1993:301), Marxist critics regard his particular type of postmodernism as "hopelessly enmeshed" with the "late-capitalist nightmare of high tech, mass marketing, and consumption". Smith (2001:3) also remarks, in a somewhat pitiful tone, that Baudrillard has "[given] up on reality".

Natoli and Hutcheon (1993:306) furthermore critique the problem of Baudrillard's monism:

> The reflexivity that we have seen as characterizing the postmodern in this view, however, can actually uncover nothing: the postmodern clash of representations is already 'enveloped' by what Baudrillard calls 'simulation'. The [p]lurality of narratives, of representations, and of the 'real', is here reduced to a monist 'Hyperreality' in which all connections are 'unhinged' […]. [T]otalizing narratives, truth claims, and even the real or historical world, are all swept away in a monistic signifying system of late-capitalist consumer ideology ('a la structuralism).

In a similar vein, Norris (cited in Smith 2001:3) is of the opinion that Baudrillard easily assumes that "'reality' is structured through and through by the order of signs or symbolic equivalences". From Norris's point of view, Baudrillard seriously underestimates reality beyond human perception. Firstly, if reality is sign-play through and through, it would mean that human perception, which is arguably the 'origin' of the sign, must penetrate all reality or matter in order to assign each slice or layer in a dialectical manner. The ideas or notions of Being-for-itself and Being-in-itself (*dasein*) (Heidegger; Sartre) must at all times be taken into consideration. If only to avoid another ontological meta-narratives like 'I think therefore I am'.

The consequences of adopting a substance-dualist approach to conceptions of reality are vast. Most relevant to this thesis is the demarcating effects of such a view, an approach to reality which divides, separates and disassociates phenomena and spheres of consciousness. At the centre of this view, one finds the most obvious division; the difference between mind-world and body-world. Minnisale's (2009:20-21) notion of "the framing of consciousness", as discussed in context of

[60] Mentalistic monism, like material monism, is criticized by pessimists on the basis that we literally don't have the cognitive capacity as of yet to understand the complex relationship between mind and matter (Jaworski 2011: section 9.6).

Murillo's 'Self Portrait' (fig.18), concerns this manifestation of a dualist view as framing-itself. In René Magritte's 'The Human Condition' (1933) (fig.23) one sees how subjectivity, as reflexive perception of an external world, is organized as different visual planes demarcated and differentiated by various 'frames'. As Marcangeli (2008:287) notes, "*The Human Condition* plays on age-old notions of painting as a window on the world, emphasized by the series of framing devices (canvas, window, curtains)". Marcangeli (2008:287) furthermore explains the significance of Magritte's Surrealist painting:

> The painting on the easel shows us what it is hiding, and yet we doubt the reality of what lies beyond the window. The double take provoked by the trompe l'oeil is unsettling, and the quiet neutrality of the image is more sinister than any overt Surrealist distortion. The relationship between reality and representation cannot be taken for granted.

Peculiar about Magritte's painting is the absolute equivalence between the view from the window and the picture on the canvas. Magritte asks what will happen when 'we' finally succeed in simulating reality to point where it is absolutely self-similar in every physical aspect. Will we not just be back at the start, then, facing the same problem of reality and our unclear role in this problem?

Mistrust in one's sense of perceptions drives a consciousness to allocate an intentional object, to divide consciousness into (intentional) subject and object. Thus the mind is created on the basis of a flight from reality, which is driven by mistrust and doubt. The mind always believes there might be 'more' to sensible reality, or that it is not what it seems. In order cultivate a doubt within the consciousness, the mind tricks the body into believing that what is right in front 'you' is only a 'cover', behind which a 'more real' reality lays. It is not the canvas, and the paint, simply as objects-in-space, which is deceptive. It is the mind deceiving itself. The sign, or image, or sticker, is the embodiment of this objectifying operation. It is the result of a dualist reality, but does not reflect a dualist reality at all, as it is two dimensional, and a space filled through and through with similar units, like pixel pixels or bitmaps.

I think of it as a kind of pixel-monism, both two-dimensional and three-dimensional[61] in form. The pixel refers to the irreducible unit of a digital image, and because the image is filled entirely.[62] Those auto stereograms, like 'Candy' (fig.24), which were popular in the 1990s, comes to mind. I always struggled to see them, which is unusual because I am visually inclined. I understand that the

[61] Currently available three-dimensional visual technology, like 3D cinema and display screens, is in reality a two-dimensional picture, only perceived to be three dimensional. In reality, all digital imagery, with the exception of still underdeveloped holographic technology, is two dimensional in physical structure.

[62] When I say that a digital image is filled in its entirety with pixels it only refers to the pixel (as tiny cube of colour) and not the material 'screen' it is displayed on, or the actual paper it is printed on. A pixel is conceptually and visibly the smallest variable unit of an image.

differentiation between the repetitions of the candy shapes in the image create an illusion of depth, a form which the mind can identify the hidden object as a simple 'plane'.

In light of the above, I recall a striking scene from a science-fiction fantasy novel by mathematician and author David Zindell titled *The Broken God* (1998). A human boy raised in the wild as an ancestral cave dweller finally comes into contact with the modern urban world. When he is shown a photograph of his father, he cannot make out the image at all, and only sees random blotches of colour. In reality, the picture of Danlo's father is after all just blotches of colour, but the mind's cognitive function automatically organizes it into familiar signs. In simple terms, one can understand this as a substance-reality which can be interpreted as both monistic and dualistic, as both observations of the image are 'true'. Danlo's father is similarly there and not there as incarnated by Danlo's 'untrained' perception, just like the hidden object in the auto stereogram.

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To now address the introductory quote to this chapter in more detail, Baudrillard's (1996:3) assumption about the mould-ability of reality implies that the simulacrum is a cognitive operation, which in turn affects material reality. What Baudrillard (1996:i) defines as the "murder weapon" is an idea, the same idea which he claims underscores his text *The Perfect Crime* (1996). Baudrillard (1996:ii) remains evasive about exactly what this idea entails, although he points towards an equivalence between "the victim and the persecutor", and similarly between "the subject and the object". And as explicated in the previous chapters, Enlightenment subjectivity entails the amputation of the subject or sense of 'I' from what is understood as the world-as-object. Descartes' popularization of a substance-dualist approach to reality is thus exactly this denial on the part of the subject, that it is somehow miraculously not part of the world. As implied throughout the previous chapters, the mind is the simulacrum. The simulacrum is the mind's disassociation from the rest of reality. It is the negation of reality, and its systematic resignification by the mind.

According to Cazeaux (2007:7) Heidegger's notion of 'something as something' refers to metaphor; as "the relation which coordinates the disclosure of any object". He also notes that Heidegger uses the term *something out to be what it is not* as direct reference to the first phrase, and thus also to metaphor as an ontological operation (Cazeaux 2007:7). However, that Heidegger associates metaphor only with the metaphysical, according to Cazeaux (2007:7), is a retreat into Cartesian metaphysics, and limits what metaphorical theories might achieve in terms of providing insight into the connection between mind and matter. At least in light of a conventional model of metaphysics,

metaphor plays an imperative part in the link between mind and matter. Cazeaux (2007:8) writes the following on metaphor:

> Metaphor is not a structure of world disclosure, as I have claimed with Heidegger, but a network of transpositions, where any individual item, any individual identity, be it a person, an experience or a meaning, occurs as a tensional interaction between competing forces.

Things thus hold multiple positions in reality, what the thing is in terms of functionality, and what something might be to a subject. Metaphor, as visual or literary strategy, is a slippage, a realignment between reality and self-consciousness and also between one person and another. It is the mind's denial of what something 'really' is (doubt) and the conversion of that 'thing' into something else. In a very similar vein to Cazeaux's idea, Hart (2005:30) argues that works of literary fiction require the reader to visualize the objects and situations described in the text, and furthermore that realism "requires of objects that they represent only themselves". He argues that in texts "accurately referred to as magical realist", objects must represent "not only themselves, but also the potential for some kind of alternative reality, some kind of 'magic'" (Hart 2005:30). The magic lies in the potential for resignification and the physical and/or metaphysical effects this new allocation of meaning will bring about.

Painter Adriaan van Zyl's paintings of Tygerberg Hospital, where he had spent much time over the years (Minnaar 2006), are especially captivating in light of his slow death in 2006. Minnaar (2006) remarks on his last exhibition titled 'Hospitaal Tyd': "He captured his sad, slow death in sharp, silent paintings". As seen in 'Hospital Still Life II' (2004) (fig.25), these scenes are of objects and interiors only, completely devoid of people, and filled with a flustering silence. His handling of texture and form, although clearly photorealistic, lends an eerie movement-like effect to the individual objects. A subtle de-materialization of the objects, as if at any moment they will peel and splinter into nothingness. And yet they remain composed, and the potential of disintegration remains suspended within the viewer.

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Hart's definition of magical realism, as it appears in literature, very much applies to still life paintings like Van Zyl's because of the quiet but restless aura produced in the objects. The magical realist object of visual art lies in the liminal spaces between dualist constructs like meaning and non-meaning, artist and viewer, object and subject, and so forth. But it is probably within Van Zyl's private mind the magic of subjectivity truly happens, for the artist-in-general is constantly aware of this self-reflexive interaction with a world-in-itself, and how these objections (for they truly are

objectified through conscious action) are reassigned within a personal narrative. People are only unique because meaning is often assigned in an irrational and associative manner. It cannot be predicted by genetic make-up or physical features. Obviously 'we' share meanings and interpretations via the symbolic and/or linguistic sphere, but day to day or moment to moment interaction between a particular individual's interpretations of the world-as-object are genuinely unique, and define who 'we' are as human beings. Therefore, the magic in realist representations and writing is very much the 'magic' one experience in self-consciousness. Magical realism is not a style like Expressionism or Cubism. It is an interaction, a slippage and resignification deeply rooted in consciousness. It is an oscillation between chains of meanings.

According to Egginton (2007:92), Lacan asks what remains when a signifier ceases to be a signifier, "when it has no more signification" (Lacan cited in Egginton 2007:92). With reference to Lacan's interpretation of Edgar Allen Poe's short story titled *The Purloined Letter* (1980), Raffoul (1996:190-191) writes the following:

> The subject's desire for an unattainable/unconditioned is a fundamental motif in Lacan's work. The now classical theme of the mirror image is a paradigm for such unattainable desire […] the effect of the signifier on the signified is 'lethal'. Yet, this death is constitutive of our desire.

In death, there is no signified. It is the inevitable fate of all self-consciousness, and it is the phenomenon we know absolutely nothing about. In Van Zyl's painting, there is only death; its sterility, impartiality and silent yet swift occurrence. What Van Zyl documented in my view, is a very technical aspect of cognition, which is brought forward in the face of death. His paintings are not metaphors for his own death, or signifiers of something else. They are, very definitively, a momentary flight from signification. The very potential for either resignification or disintegration. For the artist, it undoubtedly was the latter. For the viewer, however, the magic lies in the resignification of the objects as anything but death. This reflection or denial of death is exactly what keeps 'our' symbolic systems up and running. To the living, death will always reflect back as variable and contradictory signifiers, as a kind of metaphorical refraction.

In death, the seemingly paradoxical structure of consciousness is revealed. At the moment the signifier (idea of death) reaches the signified (actual death), the thinking subject ceases to exist. It seems rather pointless that at the moment the mental and the physical truly become one, life ceases to exist. But then again, death only happens to a thinking consciousness because such awareness reflects on it. Lacan (cited in Raffoul 1996:191) states that "the symbol manifests itself first of all as

the murder of the thing". He understands death only as signification or language itself, for it is only in the operation of signification that death can be encountered. So in spirit of Lacan's in/famous phrase, I am inclined to assume that there is no death outside of signification.

Whenever an image is made in the physical likeness of something else, this likeness or dissemblance, as Plato sees it, immediately unhinges a connection between what something is and what something looks like. A likeness, like a photograph or a 3D image, has two effects on the object or thing represented. Firstly, the likeness transforms the object into a visually identical signifier. This immediately assumes an appearance equals signifier (absence) relationship. Secondly, and as an effect of this transformation, it causes an appearance equals non-being (absence) for the simple fact that a signifier is merely a 'placeholder' for the original thing. The problem, however, comes when the original object is reconsidered and is found to be very much like the likeness, and therefore cannot be 'present' as such in its physical manifestation. The problem with signification and meaning is that it assumes that things don't exist as appearance, but somehow hide behind their appearances. Metaphor functions in this way also, as a denial of a fundamental connection between signifier and signified.

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On materialized metaphors in magical realist texts, Oliva (1999:177) writes that "[t]he process of literalization cancels the border between metaphorical and real". She also refers to Faris' (cited in Oliva 1999:177) definition of this collapse in which is stated that "the reader may experience a particular kind of verbal magic, a closing of the gap between words and the world […]. This magic happens when a metaphor is made real".

Of particular significance is Van Heerden's use of materialized metaphors in *Toorberg*, a common trait of this literary style. For example, the names of characters like 'Druppeltjie du Pisani' (transl. 'Water drop du Pisani') and his mentally disturbed mother 'Kêns Tillie' ('Crazy Tillie') directly refer to their personal narrative and meaning within the text. Druppeltjie, who is said to be "van die weemoed self" ('melancholy itself') (Van Heerden 2008:16), likes to stare into the many boreholes around the farm, but eventually falls to his death, an event which sets the story in motion. Van Heerden drew inspiration from a highly publicized story which captured the imagination of the entire country about a young child who fell into a borehole on his family's yard. As the book was released, a similar incident occurred, which, unlike the first one, ended in tragedy.

The boreholes are central to the metaphorical readings of the story but in my opinion also hold an ontological function. As the water spring called 'Die Oog' ('the eye')[63] dries up, Abel is forced to search for alternative water sources on the farm, but his obsessive pursuit is to no avail. Most interpretations of the text regard the water theme as an analogy to the loss of power of the White minority in South Africa towards the turn of the 20th century. 'Die Oog', as an extended metaphor of this power throughout the book, also allude to a kind of authoritative surveillance or higher power. But the eye is not a metaphysical entity, but rather embodied as the actual land itself, e.g., the *Toor*berg ('magic mountain').

Water is the unattainable object of Abel's desire. So in a way, the numerous boreholes around the farm become rather like incarnations of this unattainability, as the materialization of Abel's desire. But in light of materialized metaphors, the boreholes are literally drilled into the fabric of *Toorberg*'s reality, and also into the text as such. Ruptures caused by the ever growing distance between Abel and the object of his desire. Like a black hole in space, the borehole literally draws all characters to one point, forcing the resolution or final realization of each character's metaphorical significance within the text. Like death, and very much like the death of Druppeltjie, the borehole functions as the negation of signification and meaning, and like death, the producer of meaning within the narrative.

For the first few months after birth, the boy always has a water droplet on his cheek (Van Heerden 2008:17). It is the 'physical' manifestation or mark of his fate as a character within the narrative structure; from the onset, Druppeltjie is destined to fall into the borehole, or rather, to be drawn to its dark nothingness. Very much like the signifier is drawn to the signified in structuralist thought, the 'character' is inevitably drawn towards the 'metaphor'. This movement of the character, as signifier and metaphor, towards his/her fate, is what Faris sees as the metaphor made real, e.g., the 'magic' in magical realism. Druppeltjie is fated to die in the borehole. It is also the place the character-as-sign collapses into its narrative meaning (materializes), as is destined to happen, and disappears from the text-world.

One can say that the objects and characters in a magical realist novel are not understood by 'what they are' but rather what they signify in terms of the metaphorical transference of meaning, which can also be multiple, and can function simultaneously within a narrative structure. The process of

[63] In *Toorberg*, 'Die Oog' is a water sprout discovered by 'StamAbel' (transl. 'forefather' Abel), and is described as seven grooves high up in the mysterious mountain wherefrom sweet water spits (Van Heerden 2008:13). The farm is thus personified, and also the only 'character' willing to stand up against Abel and insure that debt is paid for the sins of the entire Moolman family.

metaphorical materialization also serves as a structural strategy, directing the narrative towards the plot and resolution of the metaphors/characters.

The magic in realism, when realism refers to the 'accurate' visual depiction or description of something, concerns the 'flight from reality' and the shedding of meaning associated with the object. Similarly, it is also a flight from language and meaning to inevitably realign objects and meanings in different and even multiple pairings. Duchamp's ready-mades might come to mind, for what other function does his 'Bottle Rack' (1914) (fig.26) have than shedding the meaning, definition and familiarity attached to it. It is realistic insofar it is literally the actual, unmodified object, and thus allows for resignification without 'interference' from the artist's mark. This moment of failed recognition of the object (being-in-itself) is the magical element in realism. So in many respects can elements in for example baroque still life paintings, as discussed in chapter one, be considered 'magical' insofar as the literal depiction *and* lack of given narrative unchains the object. Metaphor seems to be the way in which positions are interchanged between Heidegger's *dasein* and Sartre's being-in-itself. Whilst at the same time dodging the rational interpretation of reality, metaphor is an instant association, and it objectifies both subjects (persons) and objects (inanimate) in a similar fashion. In order to be re-chained by the mind, the object in question must 'return' to being-in-itself, which is allocated beyond human understanding, in order to be made available for recycling. In other words, for personal meaning to occur, a continual misrecognition by the subject is essential.

An image is a literal example of the death of the signified. Unlike a literary text, an image has the potential to literally depict the operation of metaphor as an operation of objectification and re-signification. In a video piece from my masters practical work titled 'Laundry Bin' (2009) (fig.27), this notion of the potential for signification and the unchaining of the object-meaning relationship is illustrated. An empty laundry bin spins continuously in a black space and is projected onto a large wall. Although the animation is achieved through very precise stop-frame animation, it can just as well be considered to be a computer simulation by the viewer. The isolation of the basket as simulated and suspended spinning object voids its existence as allocated signifier temporarily until the viewer's mind resignifies the object into a subjective narrative. This 'void' is the magic Hart speaks about.

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The monistic characteristics of magical realism are obvious. The general strategy used in such literary texts can be considered a collapse between projected spheres which have been constructed by dualistic thinking. These are the usual suspects; rigid binary concepts like subject and object, inside

and outside, real and unreal and mind and matter and so forth. In *Toorberg*, for example, there is no definite division between the living and the dead. And following typical tricks of the trait, this aspect of the text-world is presented as totally ordinary, the reader often not even aware whether a character is deceased or not. Other monistic critiques of dualistic structure in Van Heerden's novel concern the typical fragmentation of a linear timeline, a natural interaction between myth and reality, and the incidence of materialized metaphors, as discussed in the above.

But the real monistic dimension to the magical realist text is to be found in a possible collapse between the reader and the text-as-world[64] which is what Thiem (2005:237) defines as the textualization of the reader. This can happen in two ways, says Thiem (2005:235); either a reader is transported into the text-world, or the textualization happens in the real world of the reader. Concerning the latter, Thiem notes this textualization as being a "seeming impossibility" and compares this impossibility to that of "entering into the world *inside* a mirror or a painting" (Thiem 2005:237) (original emphasis). In other words, the reader can either enter the text literally or literarily. He asks, "how do you get in?" (Thiem 2005:237).

According to Thiem (2005:237), Marcel describes how "as a child he would put down his bedtime book and enter the dreamlike state between sleep and waking" and thus experience "the dissolution of the boundary between the self and the world of the text". This "oneiric resonance of textualization", says Thiem (2005:237-8), "arises out of the literalization of a common metaphor" which literally absorbs the reader into the text. As Nell (cited in Thiem 2005:238) observes, reader 'trances' are similar to dream states insofar as "reading performs the prodigious task of carrying us off to other worlds". This is what he calls "ludic reading" (Nell cited in Thiem 2005:238), a form of pleasure in this "subjective mode or condition of textualization". Thiem (2005:239) elaborates on Nell's reader, claiming that the textualization of ludic reading is paradoxical because s/he experiences the thrill of the "exciting and dangerous fictional world" without suffering the consequences of this participation. His model of textualization assumes a rupture in the safely detached ludic reader, and thus postulates a reader which completely dissolves into the text as an actor or agent (Thiem 2005:239).[65]

As a definitive operational component of metafiction, textualization intends to integrate text and reader by confusing the world of the reader with the text-world. It is not so much the reader

[64] Thiem (2005:235) contemplates on Leon Bloy's idea of the world as a text, and whether one can also treat "texts as worlds", or literally enter "the world of a text".

[65] Thiem (2005:239) explains this dissolution between reader and text with reference to Cortázar's *Continuity of Parks*, wherein a character sits in an armchair reading a new novel, possibly mirroring the reader's position and actions. Having conflated the reader with the character in this manner, the reader experiences the subsequent action directly as the character would.

'travelling' into the text-world, or vice versa, but rather the 'materialization' of the fiction into the reader's world by being read, imagined and visualized in real-time. There never was a 'different' text-world to begin with, for it only exists in cognitive interpretation, and therefore exists in the same present time as everything else perceived by this self-reflective consciousness.

What I draw from the various ideas and models discussed up to this point, is that in self-consciousness there is only one narrative at any particular time. Although this narrative is a conflation of mental imagery, perception and linguistic interpretation, it remains a singular point of rotation around a kind of cognitive singularity, a point of negated signification like Van Heerden's boreholes in *Toorberg*. All the characters are subject to the 'gravity' of the borehole, and all the characters are in some way present when Druppeltjie dies.

In 'Andreas die Digter' (fig.28) and 'Kêns Tillie' (fig.29), the first two of my works to directly reference Van Heerden's characters, my intention is to capture images which come to mind when I read *Toorberg*. These images are visual 'collages' or conflations between Van Heerden's 'realistic' descriptions and my own personal and associative visuals.

There are many reasons why I decided to use *Toorberg* as focus for my fine arts practical, and its relevance is applicable to different sectors of my life as a young, upper-middle class white man in post 1994 South Africa. Working with the novel seemed the obvious thing to do at the point various seemingly unconnected narratives and events in my life suddenly fit together. Connecting with the Karoo landscape whilst reading the book intensified the impact it had, and allowed for curious textualizations in my own reality simply because I was in that landscape at the time. *Toorberg* literally, and very much physically, altered my experience of, or 'intentional approach' to, the Karoo landscape.

Lakoff and Johnson (1999:391) argue that if metaphor doesn't occur, self-consciousness cannot exist, that it is "virtually impossible to conceptualize the mind without metaphor. For them, Descartes' philosophy "was a new metaphoric view of mind as representing some 'inner' realm the objects existing in the 'external' world, the problem of knowledge became the problem of how we could know the internal ideas (representations) in our minds actually correspond to the 'things in themselves'" (Lakoff & Johnson 1999:392). In other words, an "inner mental stage in which metaphorical objects (our ideas) are illuminated by an inner light ("Natural Light of Reason") and are observed by a metaphorical spectator (our faculty of understanding)" (Lakoff & Johnson 1999:393).

Ricoeur (1978:7) writes the following on the allocation of metaphor: "I conclude that the 'place' of metaphor, its intimate and ultimate abode, is neither the name, nor the sentence, nor even the

discourse, but the copula of the verb *to be*. The metaphorical 'is' at once signifies both 'is not' and 'is like'". It is in this regard, Lakoff and Johnson (1999:543) notes that Paul DeMan attracted considerable philosophical attention with his analyses of metaphors lying at the heart of philosophical theories. Even though DeMan were incorrect to think that these metaphors are unstable and indeterminate of meaning,[66] Lakoff and Johnson none the less give credit to DeMan for his contribution to the relationship between metaphor and philosophy.

For Baudrillard, the sign never returns to a substance-monistic or being-in-itself state, but remains in the mental monism of hyperreality. Also in the light of Baudrillard's simulacrum, metaphorical operation would be considered explicitly simulacral, and yet, metaphor has been present in human culture. Thus, to believe in simulacrum, one must believe that metaphor is simulacral.

What is the point in arguing about this if simulacrum, which means the loss of original or previous meanings attached to a sign or object, has always been an integral part of self-reflexive experience, and that 'we' will never 'know' the world-as-object except as conceptual cluster of empirical data? And yet Baudrillard (1996:5) insists on the contemporary nature of the simulacrum wherein "'we' have resolved the problem of truth or reality of this world" with "technical simulation, and by creating a profusion of images in which there is nothing to see". His theory thus supposes a 'past', when the simulacrum hasn't been fulfilled, and a present simulacral state, as generated by technical simulation. Botting (1999:88) insists that Baudrillard's postmodernity does not assume a "paternal metaphor to establish and regulate differences […] it allows for no point at which signifier and signified can be knotted together to arrest the play of images and signification". Therefore the simulacrum theory is an anti-metaphorical view, "refusing the possibility of attaining an external position of singularity" (Botting 1999:88).

Botting (1999:88) explains what is meant with a paternal metaphor:

> The paternal metaphor emerges as a cultural problem. Lacan's analysis of the real and the object a offers both a diagnosis, as it were, of postmodernity […] The postmodern condition denotes a gap in the way the world is presented and lived, a disjunction between imaginary and symbolic registers in which a hole in the real is manifested.[67]

[66] Lakoff and Johnson (1999:543) argues that DeMan is incorrect to think that a metaphorical model of ontology suggests an unstable form and structure because "[w]e have seen how conceptual metaphors ground abstract concepts through cross-domain mappings using aspects of our embodied experience and how they establish the inferential structures within philosophies".

[67] Lacan's Real concerns absence and it is language which has power over the Real insofar as the Real is everything outside of the Symbolic (Bowie 1993:94). It can be mental as well as material and ultimately concerns "the ineffable" or "the impossible" (Bowie 1993:95) in being "undifferentiated" and "inassimilable to symbolization" (Evans 1996:162).

So whereas the Baudrillard gives up on reality, magical realism in literature and art does not assume a meaningless overarching reality. Its effects are that of revealing the metaphoric operation of 'our' reality, and in so doing, allowing access to a singular or monistic register within our understanding of reality. If 'our' reality has fallen into simulacrum, self-consciousness would cease to make meaning, narrative and metaphorical reassignments and therefore cease to exist. Metaphor and what seems to be arbitrary signification is what prevents perceptive consciousness to fall into a sterile and self-similar observational state, it is the rational link between an irrational and abstract separation between thought and matter. It is in this regard that magical realism should be considered as ontological, and a very legitimate reflection of reality *as it is for* self-reflexive consciousness.

Digital technology and screens are not a new technological simulation. They only reveal the simulacrum which already dwells in the head. The Likeness, the image, now in HD, perhaps served the desperate pursuits of dualist thinking and objective rationality at some point in the past. However, it turns out to be its Achilles heel after all, for what digital imaging reflects back to 'us', is an integrated and monistic reality, a one space wherein everything is connected. It is not possible to 'trick' an all-encompassing reality, for one's transgression is most probably a very necessary operation within that reality. And most importantly, to insure the (inevitable) reabsorption of the reflection will take place. Far from a hyperreal wonderland in the desert of the real, Western culture now faces a 'magical', for lack of a better word, reality. The 'magic' which erupts amidst the rapid disintegration of rigid dualism.

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My art practice seeks to allocate the 'real' instance of Baudrillard's idea of the simulacrum as it is implicated in the notion of subjectivity. More specifically, I contemplate simulacrum as hypothetically located in the interaction between subjectivity and materialistic and/or mental images. Throughout this text, I have sketched an image of what I imagine subjectivity in digital culture to be; that of a spatio-temporal point of observation which is always and at all times surrounded by physical and mental images. Assessment of the image, meant in the broadest sense, is as Sartre has shown, also the contemplation of reality as-it-appears. This encapsulates the ontological (philosophical) nature of my work, which otherwise also draws from critical theory, psychoanalysis and literature.

In support of my art practice, this body of research thus serves to better my understanding of the operation of representational images as it pertains to the constitution of what can be considered my personal narrative or subjectivity. The study of the nature and operation of subjectivity as-it-appears

in the world can only ever by a personal investigation, as art practice reveals, and it entails the sifting through memories, thoughts and sense perceptions. I always think of subjectivity as an act of comparing different images or representations of the same thing, comparable to looking for truth in a box of photographs from your life.

I locate Baudrillard's idea of simulacrum specifically within thís register of reality, as implicated in the personal assessment of perceivable reality; in other words, reality as-it-appears to a thinking consciousness in physical/material as well as mental form. My representation of different objects through stop-frame, in for example 'Laundry Bin' (2009) (fig.27) and 'Telephone' (2011) (fig.30), contemplates what Husserl calls intentionality, or the intentional object. With regard to these two examples, I consider my formal treatment of objects as the manifestation of my personal intention towards the objects. Formal manipulation in my work stresses the subjective nature of self-conscious experience, moreover, how the image, whether mental or physical (as representation) can only ever reveal this uniqueness of subjective experience.

In 'Telephone', the use of light, or light-painting techniques to be specific, serves as metaphor for my intention towards the world-as-object. The light acts as the threshold between myself, the subject who intends, and the intended object. Throughout my work, the light is personified as such, e.g., as the bridge between a mentalistic subject and a world-of-objects. Particularly in the *Toorberg* videos, one encounters the light as a force which illuminates the objects to the effect that the objects appear three dimensional, even though two-dimensional digital images were used in the stop-frame sequence. And thus in more ways than one, this transferal from two- to three-dimensional through the movement of light, alludes to the interaction between something like a photograph, and the mind's remembrance of this particular photograph. The *Toorberg* video's speaks of a conflation between mind and image; between exterior and exterior spatio-temporal reality.

It is in the light of vision wherein I locate subjectivity as simulacrum. Dramatic and seductive lighting in 'Bloukrans Landscape #1' serves to indicate an operation within perception and subjective experience which is, in fact, rather subtle, and also much more concerned with thoughts and emotion than with the image. I implement the light, then, as the material manifestation, or analogy of, the mind's approach towards a sensible (visual) world. However, in suggesting that the light represents a mentalistic register, I nonetheless insist on a very tangible interaction between the mental and the material manifestation of reality. The light is the 'touch' of 'my' vision', or, my intention and approach towards the object. The Bloukrans[68] landscape surrenders to my intention,

[68] Bloukrans is a farm in the Karoo near Laingsburg, South Africa. It is where I have taken most of my photographic material.

and reveals only, and forever, what I seek or expect to find. At this point I want to highlight a fundamental idea in my work, which also pertains to the bigger argument in this dissertation; that of how personal narrative (as influenced by visual media and texts) involuntarily distort sensible reality, like the Karoo landscape. The subject does not seek *dasein*, the in-itselfness of, in this case, the Bloukrans terrain, but rather seeks to necessarily produce a simulacral image, or at least one which is in tune with the particular person's frame of reference. My use of dramatic light-painting effects therefore signifies what I have up to now defined as the simulacral operation of the mind.

'Bloukrans landscape #1' captures the 'emptiness' of this dry yet vibrant terrain. But herein is rooted the very heart of my research. I can best define it as a return to the landscape (materiality), or rather, a re-embodiment within the natural landscape. But the legitimacy of this re-embodiment is suspicious. The light in the *Toorberg* videos appears excessively artificial and alienating. And it is thus also the nostalgia for the landscape I wish to illustrate in the same way the subject is nostalgic for *dasein*, exactly because it cannot be experienced or reached. The inaccessibility, or in-itselfness, of sensible reality, is the price paid for the mind to exist. Moreover, *dasein* is the necessary counterpart to self-consciousness, as I wish to illustrate with the alienating yet seductive lighting.

On turning our attention back to 'Laundry Bin', I wish to emphasize how the technical process required to produce a stop-frame animation video is very similar to the way the human eye observes reality; that is, as a sequence of individual freeze frames animating a moving image. The eyes follow the movements of light and shadow in a similar way to how the light in the *Toorberg* videos illuminate the objects. 'Laundry bin' produces a wagon wheel effect, also known as a stroboscopic effect, which is an optical illusion that causes the spokes of a wheel to appear as if in reverse motion. Personally, the laundry bin has always represented the idea that perception itself is the illusion, or stated differently, that perception itself is the only illusion there is.

My intention with the use of stop-frame animation and light-painting also concerns the broader ideas in philosophy associated with, respectively, substance monism and substance-dualism. My use of the light, and the theme of a collapse between fact and fiction, or real and imaginary, rather suggests a conjectural monistic reality, where no illusion can exist, where, as Sartre seems to suggest, there is only image. I say this with respects to the light moving over the entire scene of objects 'equally', as if the entire scene becomes a 'consciousness' in itself. I favour a more monistic approach to reality, as opposed to a dualistic one. Like magical realism, my imagery seeks to undermine and collapse the dualistic approach to subjectivity put forth by Descartes.

Conclusion

Hiding in plain sight

With regards to the various examples I have presented, I conclude that Baudrillard's theory of the simulacrum can only be upheld from a dualistic (philosophical) approach to reality, meaning a reality where a distinction is made between 'real' and 'fake' or 'self' and 'other'. The simulacrum is only visible from the perspective of the *cogito,* for it is only according to such a model of subjectivity a subject would question and doubt the world or reality as-it-appears. If naturalistic painting is held as precursor for contemporary technology, we see that this will to simulate is not a result of technology, but rather a will in the mind exercised by means of technology. As I have demonstrated, the early modern devotion to naturalistic representation, despite abstraction in the modernist movements, is finally accomplished with digital technology.

By shifting Baudrillard and Virilio's emphasis on technology, as producer of simulacrum, to the notion of subjectivity, as operation of simulacrum, I have demonstrated the necessity of simulacrum in subjectivity, or in this specific context better understood as personal narrative. In order to function as a theoretical model, Baudrillard's theory of simulacrum must assume a state of not being simulacral in order to have any sort of validity. However, the relative nature of perception and subjective experience does not allow nor provide stable parameters wherefrom to make such a judgement.

What we see throughout the history of representation is a desire for verisimilitude with the world. With regard to this desire for verisimilitude, I do not consider the leap made from Caravaggio's 'Still Life With Fruit' (1601-1605) (fig.1) to high definition video capture to be so large. And also considering the scientific approach to the illusion of perspective in the Renaissance, it would seem that the quest for simulacrum has been in the making for a few hundred years.

As I have suggested throughout this text, simulacrum is not something 'out-there' in the world, which can be judged from an objective position. Quite the contrary. I have come to regard simulacrum as the very collapse between what the Cartesian model indicates as subject and object. As we have discussed in chapter one, the Cartesian cogito, or unified subject, requires a distanced position from a world-as-object. Not only does it radically separate the subject from the world, but also the mental from the material, and the physical from the being. It is only from a Cartesian position a judgement of illusion can be made.

We cannot solve the problem of the illusion of the world from a subjective position because the illusion only appears in self-reflexivity. To solve the problem would be to truly and fully understand the inaccessible 'part' of the world, or *dasein.* Only when the inquisitive mind hits against what Sartre calls the being-in-itself, it realises that access is impossible. By extension it can be said that that which defines self-reflexive consciousness is exactly a movement away from *dasein*, better defined as a conspicuous distortion and transformation of the sensible world.

In light of my research into Baudrillard's simulacrum and hyperreality I contend that it is true with regards to self-conscious experience of the sensible world. I furthermore argue that our technologies for visual representation, even though capable of a great degree of verisimilitude with the world, can never solve the 'problem' with the illusion of reality. Simply put, there is no way 'out'. Our images and representations only confirm those layers upon layers, it only remains image.

To now turn our attention to my analogy of the sticker in chapter two. The sticker represents the three-dimensional world as-it-appears in perception. Our sight, of the light on objects, sees only surface. What Jameson (cited in Kellner 1995:236) means with new flatness, is perhaps better imagined as a sticker. Postmodern image culture only confirms the superficiality of our experience of reality. The sticker is essentially one layer or sheet, and yet it folds and distorts into three-dimensional shapes and arrangements. And herein lies my concern with monism – the monist approach recognizes that separation, isolation and division exist and is necessary for self-consciousness. Above that it indicates the one-dimensionality of the phenomena we call existence. It is only when the one-dimensional (image) is understood, that one can realise that simulacrum is impossible.

It is specifically in my art practice wherein I have come to hold that simulacrum is impossible. In photography, or video capture, the light on the objects is what animates them, and brings them to life. Whether on a high definition digital display, or in 3D, interplay between light and shadow remains the defining characteristic of what it is. The light is the simulation itself in a light-based reality. When you control the light, you control the simulation that is reality, which of course, as we have established, is not really a simulation at all. Simulation is all there is to begin with.

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Fig. 21. William Hunter, Unknown, from Atlas of the Gravid Uterusof. 1774.

Available: http:// […] [2011 May 31].

Fig. 22. *Bodies: The Exhibition*, Atlanta-based Premier Exhibitions Inc.'s. 2005. Still of dissected and preserved cadaver. Life size.

Available: http://www.telegraph.co.uk/news/picturegalleries/picturesoftheday/4943560/Pictures-of-the-day-5-March-2009.html?image=2 [2011 May 31].

Fig. 23. René Magritte, *The Human Condition*. 1933. Oil on canvas.

Available: http://www.visual-arts-cork.com/museums/national-gallery-of-art-washington.htm

Fig. 24. Austereogram*, Candy* 2009. Stop-frame animation video.

http://www.google.co.za/imgres?q=autostereogram+candy&hl=en&safe=off&sa=X&biw=1364&bih=640&tbm=isch&prmd=imvns&tbnid=N2nOcdUTE90

Fig. 25. *Adriaan van Zyl, Hospital Still Life II*. 2004. Oil on canvas.

Available: http://www.artthrob.co.za/05nov/reviews/ava.html

Fig. 26. Marcel Duchamp*, Bottle Rack*. 1914. Readymade bottle rack made galvanized iron, 37cm x 59cm.

Available: http://blog.linedandunlined.com/post/403628945/on-bottle-rack-by-marcel-duchamp

Fig 27. Niel Vosloo, *Laundry Bin*. 2009. Stop-frame animation video.

Fig. 28. Niel Vosloo, *Andreas die Digter*. 2011. Photographic image.

Fig. 29. Niel Vosloo, *Kêns Tillie*. 2011. Photographic image.

Fig. 30. Niel Vosloo, *Telephone*. 2011. Stop-frame animation video.

Addendum

Illustrations

Fig 1. Michelangelo Merisi da Caravaggio, *Still Life With Fruit*. 1601-1605. Oil on canvas, 105cmx84cm.

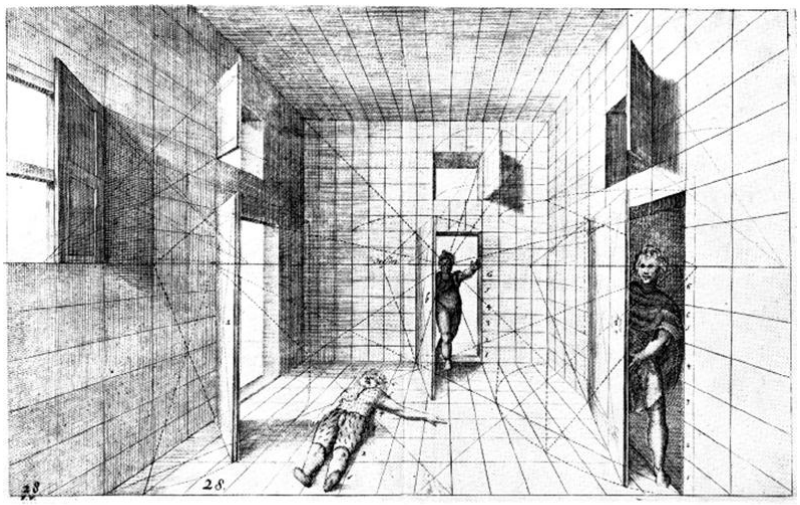
Fig 2 (left). Hans Holbein, *The Ambassadors*. 1533. Oil and tempera on panel, 207x209cm.

Fig 3 (above). Detail from Hans Holbein, *The Ambassadors*. 1533. Oil and tempera on panel, 207x209cm.

Fig 4. Colin Richards, *Blood, Stone with White Vein.* 2003. Full colour inkjet print, pen & ink. 14.0 x 21.8 cm.

Fig 5. Colin Richards, *Homunculus.* 1998. Watercolour, 42 x 34 x 3.4 cm.

Fig 6. David Teniers, *The Archduke Leopold's William in His Gallery in Brussels*. 1647. oil on canvas. 127 x 162cm.



JAN VREDEMAN DE VRIES, *Perspective* (Leiden, 1604–5), plate 28. Courtesy, the Bancroft Library, Berkeley, California.

Fig 7 Jan Vredeman De Vries. *Perspective Plate 28*. 1604-5. The Bancroft Library, Berkeley, California.

Fig 8. Juan Sánchez Cotán, *Still Life with Quince, Cabbage, Melon, and Cucumber.* 1602. Oil on canvas.

Fig 9. Pere Borrell del Caso, *Escaping Criticism.* 1874. Oil on canvas.

Fig 10. *The Ring*, 2002. Film. Directed by Gore Verbinski. USA: Dreamworks Pictures.

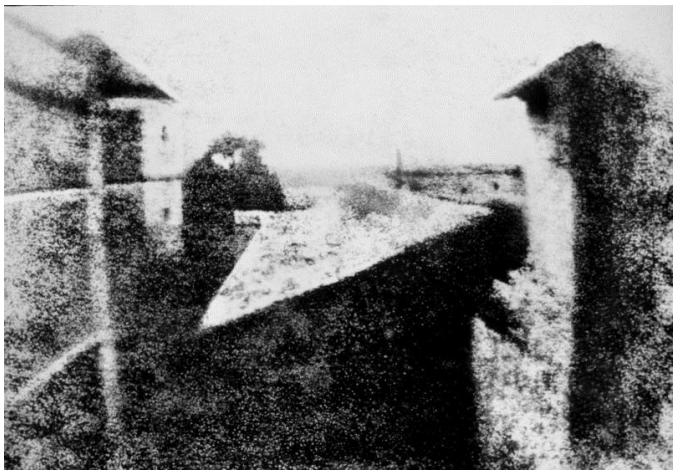


Fig 11. Joseph Nicéphore Niépce, *View from the Window at Le Gras*. c. 1826. Photographic print.

Fig 12. Robert Rauschenberg, *White Painting*. 1951. House paint on canvas, 72 x 72in four panels. Collection: The artist's estate.

Fig 13. *Lost Highway*, Film. Directed by David Lynch. Still From film.

Fig 14. *The Haverstraw Tunnel*. 1897. Short film. Biograph. Still from short film.

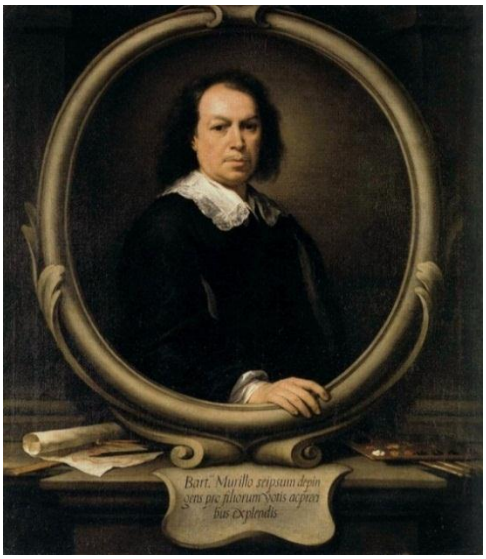
Fig 15. *Strangers on a Train*. 1951. Film. Directed by Alfred Hitchcock. Still from Film.

Fig 16. *Inception*, 2010. Film. Directed by Christopher Nolan. Still from Film.

Fig 17. Jeff koons, *Balloon Flower* (Magenta). C.2008.

Fig 18. Bartolomé Esteban Murillo, *Self Portrait*. 1670-3. Oil on canvas.

Fig 19. (bottom right) Bridget Baker, *The Blue Collar Girl*. Still from 'Chroma Key Series'. 2004. Photographic print.



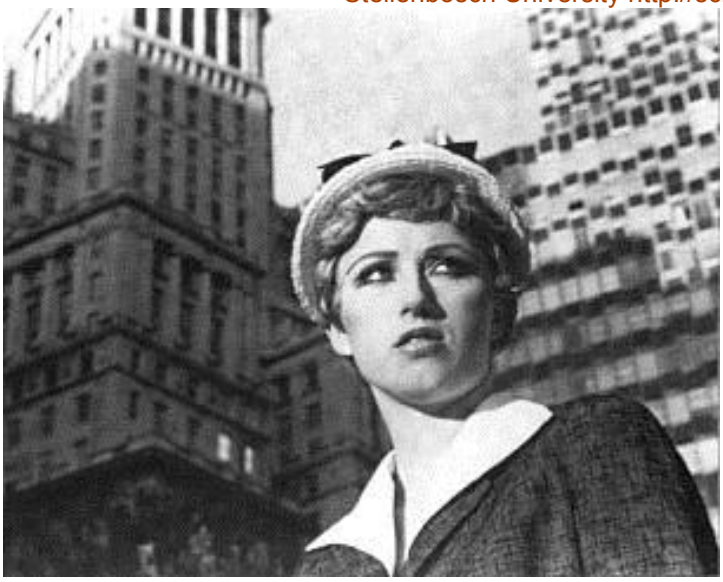


Fig 20. Cindy Sherman, *Untitled* from 'Untitled Film Stills'. 1977-1982. Photographic print.

Fig 21. William Hunter, *Untitled*, 1774. From Atlas of the Gravid Uterusof.

Fig 22. Gunther von Hagen, *Body Worlds*. 2005. Still of dissected and preserved cadaver.

Fig 23. René Magritte, *The Human Condition.* 1933. Oil on Canvas.

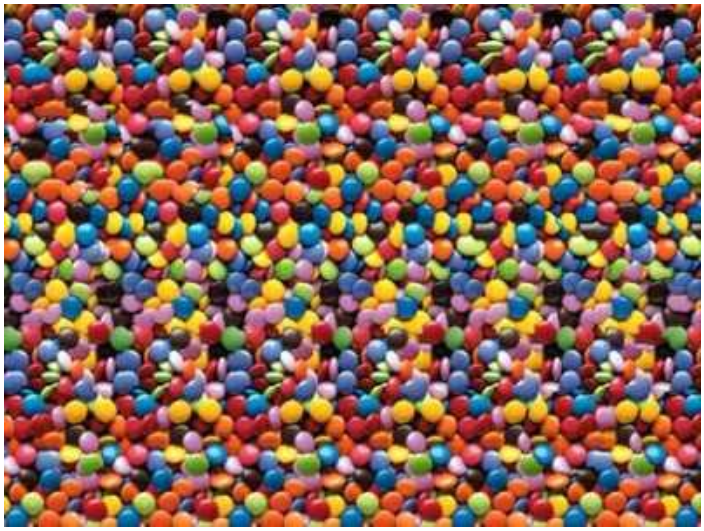


Fig 24. *Candy,* Austereogram image.

Fig 25. Adriaan van Zyl, *Hospitaal Tyd II*. 2004. Oil on canvas.

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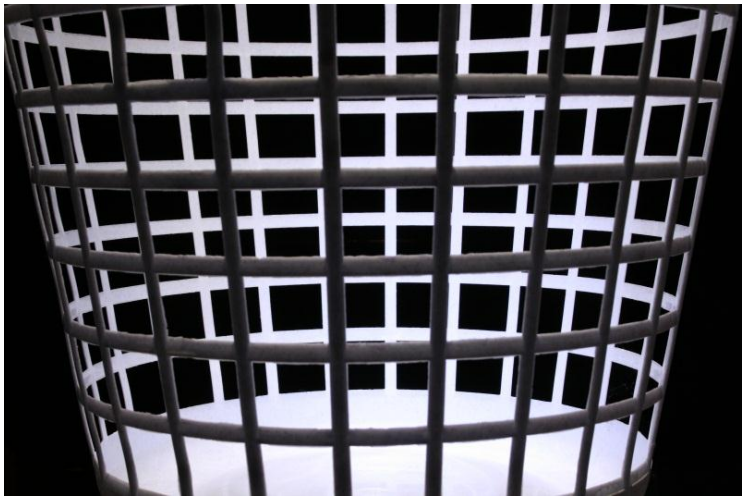

Fig 27. Niel Vosloo, *Laundry Bin*, 2009. Stop-frame animation video.

Fig 28. Niel Vosloo**,** *Andreas die Digter,* 2011. Digital Photographic Image.

Fig 29. Niel Vosloo*, Kêns Tillie*. 2011. Digital Photographic Image.

Fig 30. Niel Vosloo, *Telephone*. 2011. Digital Photographic Image.

Fig 31. Niel Vosloo, *Bloukrans Lanscape #1*. 2011. Digital Photographic Image.